MODERN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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PUSHKIN

MODERN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

BY

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CONTENTS

PAGE

PRELIMINARY 5

THE AGE OF THE GREAT NOVELISTS:

1. 'The Natural School': Aksakov . 14
2. From Turgenev to Leskov . . . 22
3. Dostoevsky and Tolstoy . . . 42
4. The Drama 66
5. Poets 71
6. Critics and Publicists . . . 75
7. Chekhov and after 82

THE NEW AGE 101

Bibliography of English Translations . 115

Index 120

36431

2535·57

LIST OF PORTRAITS

Pushkin . . . . . *frontispiece*

Gogol . . . . . *facing p.* 12

Aksakov 18

Turgenev 22

Leskov 40

Dostoevsky 44

Tolstoy 54

Ostrovsky 68

Nekrasov 74

Chekhov 86

Gorky 92

Blok 108

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PRELIMINARY

Russian literature is synonymous, for the purposes of the general reader, with Modern Russian literature. There is, it is true, an Old Russian literature, which goes back as far as the middle of the eleventh century. It is of prime importance to the student of Old Russian civilization, but offers little in the way of literary masterpieces. The exceptions, like the medieval prose-poem of *The Campaign of Igor* (*c.* 1186) and the autobiography of the Archpriest Avvakum (1620–1681), only prove the rule. They are almost mysteriously isolated, and rise like solitary volcanoes over a gently undulating plain. The old Russians were not lacking in artistic impulses, but they directed them into different channels. They gave expression to their sense of beauty in their religious painting and in their church architecture, rather than in works of imaginative literature. Old Russia was not favourably placed for the development of a literary tradition. On the one hand she was separated from the West by a religious difference which excluded her from the community of Latin nations. On the other hand she could not in any appreciable degree learn from Byzantine Greece: there was no necessity for the Russians to study Greek, as the custom of the Eastern Church gave the national vernaculars an entirely independent ecclesiastical status. Only those Greek writings were translated or imitated which were indispensable for the working of the Church. Poetry, if it did chance to crop up, had no tradition to lean upon. *The Campaign of Igor* is the solitary remnant of a native school of secular poetry, which, but for a lucky chance, might have disappeared without leaving a trace.

Modern Russian literature owes next to nothing to Old Russian literature. From the point of view of literary culture it is entirely an offshoot of Western civilization. It has many roots in

Russian life, but no roots in any native literary tradition. The Russian literary language had a continuous development from the oldest time to ours. But the pedigree of the literary forms and ideas, naturalized in Russia since the eighteenth century, has to be traced to the French and Provençal poets of the twelfth century or to the Italian Renaissance, not to any native source. All this does not of course impair the originality of Russian literature. What happened in Russia in the 17–18th century was very much like what happened in England in the 13–14th century. English medieval and modern literature is a development of Continental traditions, rather than of the poetry of *Beowulf* and the Caedmon poems. The originality of English as of Russian literature is due to the creative power of individual genius and to creative forces developed by the nation outside the domain of literature, not to a continuous development from the earliest times. The same may apply in varying degrees to every modern nation. Greek is the only European literature that has developed along entirely native lines.

Modern Russian literature began in the seventeenth century as an imitation of Polish models, and up to the middle of the eighteenth century it was but the province of a province.

Lomonosov (1711–1765), who has been called the Peter the Great of Russian civilization, was the first to go directly to the source of the literary culture of the times—to the literature of French Classicism. For eighty years Russian literary history becomes the history of a gradual assimilation of the best fruit of Western literature. The writers of the time are schoolmasters and translators whose task it was to teach and to adapt rather than to create. The period did produce in Derzhavin (1743–1816) a poet of eccentric genius and abundant originality, but the main line of progress is marked by the names of men of less creative power, but greater cultural receptivity. The chief of these names after Lomonosov's are those of Karamzin (1766–1826) and

Zhukovsky (1783–1852), two great pedagogues, who familiarized Russia with Rousseau and Ossian and Herder and all the pre-romantic literature of England and Germany. Zhukovsky did more than that, for he brought Russian verse to perfection and set the standard of style which was to become the style of the Golden Age of Russian Poetry. This Golden Age began with the publication of Pushkin's first book in 1820.

Pushkin is the greatest name in Russian literature. He is more than that to the Russian mind: he is the impersonation and the purest essence of poetry; he is also what Goethe is to the Germans and Dante to the Italians—the ideal incarnation and symbol of national civilization. Few foreigners have been able to understand this Russian attitude towards Pushkin. Still fewer have found it possible to place him, as the Russians do, among the greatest poets of all nations. Though he is the most universal and the most European of Russian writers, he is still the divinity of a strictly national cult. This sounds paradoxical, but is only natural. The foreign reader values Russian writers for what he thinks are their most Russian qualities—qualities which he cannot find anywhere else. Russian literature is still exotic to the rest of Europe, and prized there in the measure of its obvious originality. To the Russian reader this preoccupation does not exist, and it is precisely Pushkin's universality, his *pan-humanity*, as Dostoevsky put it, that makes him what he is to the Russian mind. Another reason why only Russians can fully appreciate him is that he was a poet, and a poet can be really understood only by those who have mastered the language he wrote in well enough to feel those imponderable and elusive elements which give each word its poetical value. Then again the beauty of his poetry is of a kind which is not usually expected from a poet calling himself a Romanticist, the contemporary of Shelley and Victor Hugo. His virtues are harmony, taste, and sense of measure. His effects are never startling. They are produced by

outline rather than by colour ; by continuous excellency, not by ' purple patches '. In a word, his poetry is classical. And if the classical virtues are admired in Greek and French poetry, it is not in quest of them that the English or French reader turns to Russia, the country of Bolshevism, of Dostoevsky, and of the Russian ballet. It is indeed difficult for the foreigner, perhaps impossible if he is ignorant of the language, to believe in the supreme greatness of Pushkin among Russian writers. Yet it is necessary for him to accept the belief, even if he disagrees with it. Otherwise every idea he may form of Russian literature and Russian civilization will be inadequate and out of proportion with reality.

Pushkin's place in Modern Russian literature is very similar to Chaucer's place in Medieval English literature. Like Chaucer, he does not in any sense break away from the preceding international tradition, but without trying to be national is national by the mere fact of his superior genius and of his comprehensive humanity. Like Chaucer's, his poetry is aristocratic in origin but universal in scope, and like Chaucer's it becomes the starting-point of a great tradition, and throws into the shade all that preceded it. The difference is that in England immediately after Chaucer there began a period of decline and comparative sterility which lasted for more than a century, in which Chaucer's tradition was squandered by a succession of inferior imitators. Pushkin's period finished much more abruptly—in fact it finished before his death ; but it was succeeded by a period of powerful and antagonistic creative forces, during which Pushkin survived rather as a great name than as a living influence ; he becomes a treasure-house carefully guarded, but scarcely drawn upon. Like Chaucer, Pushkin was not alone ; by the side of Chaucer there was Gower, by the side of Pushkin a whole host of poets, some of whom, like Baratynsky and Yazykov, were men of powerful and strikingly original genius (more strikingly original than

Pushkin, and for that very reason inferior to him). But even the most indubitably minor poets of the group have such an air of distinction and elegance about them, they use their limited powers with such adequacy, there is in them so much of taste and beautiful craftsmanship, that even apart from Pushkin this period was a Golden Age of poetry—so high was the artistic level of its poetical production.

This Golden Age came to an end about 1831, and was followed by a period of about fifteen years of rapid transition. Romanticism, which had been a watchword but not an essential element of the preceding decade, now asserted itself more strongly. German influences poured in in full stream. It was an age of conflicting ideas and rapid evolution. In contrast to the harmony of the preceding age it was dominated by the struggle of opposing forces. The great names of the period are those of poets of discord and violent contrasts—Gogol, Lermontov, and Tyutchev (who wrote and published most of his best work before 1840 though it met with recognition only much later). What is even more important, the fundamental conceptions of art were changed. It ceased to be the free and self-justified craftsmanship it had been to Pushkin and his contemporaries, and came to be dominated by or subservient to ideas. The aesthetic doctrines of the great German Philosophers played a principal part in this change. As a consequence the standards of workmanship were lowered and the poetic culture of the preceding age disappeared. Lermontov and Tyutchev were great poets, but they remained isolated, without any healthy undergrowth round them. Poetry began to give way to prose. Still the centre of gravity remained on the side of poetry, and the prose of Gogol, who wrote no verse, is a poet's prose, or at worst a rhetorician's; it abounds in rhythm, in verbal effects, and in lyrical emotion.

At the same time the idealism and the cult of the Absolute produced by the contact with German metaphysics gave birth to

a new mentality which contrasts sharply with the finite and relative humanism of Pushkin.

Russian Idealism came into being in the two opposite and yet twin forms—of Slavophilism and Radicalism. Herzen called them the two heads of a single Janus. Both were intrinsically dogmatic and aimed at the subjection of all human activity to one supreme ideal. The more complete and refined philosophy of Slavophilism attracted the more philosophical minds, and became the leaven of all independent original Russian thought. Radicalism became a secular religion which imposed itself on the great majority of educated Russians for more than sixty years. The Radical journalist Belinsky moulded the mentality of the budding *intelligentsia* and imposed on the public his idea of what in a general scheme of progress literature should be. Gogol, interpreted as he was by Belinsky in a violent and arbitrary fashion, became the idol of the young generation. There came into existence a 'Natural School' which, after a few years' groping, sprang into sudden maturity in the bewilderingly abundant literary harvest of the year 1846. All this rapid development made the writings of the preceding age obsolete, and the new generation retained from the times that preceded it only that which it could interpret as an anticipation of its own literary and social ideals. It retained Pushkin as a myth rather than as a body of work, and it retained all that was felt to be akin to its own Realism. The preceding age began to be seen exclusively from the angle of the new age, and it was left to our own times to restore to it its true proportions—a process which is by no means at an end.

Though some writers who like broad and general views have spoken of the inherent Realism of the Russian people and traced its history to the popular tales and the popular epics of the North, I do not believe in the use of such racial generalizations. The real fathers of Russian Realism are Boileau, Molière, and La Fontaine. There is in the poetry of Derzhavin, among many

other remarkable things, a vigorous and eccentric strain of naturalism; but the traditions of realism first asserted themselves in Russia mainly in connexion with the classical genres of satire, comedy, and fable. The satires of Cantemir, the comedies of Fonvizin, the long line of Russian fabulists culminating in the wonderful (and yet French-bred) raciness of Krylov, are the true predecessors of the Natural School. The traditions of Molière, Fonvizin, and Krylov met in the work of Griboyedov (1795–1829), whose great comedy (*Gore ot Uma* = *The Misfortune of being Clever*, or better, *Woe from Wit*), published in 1825, is the first revelation of that wonderful power of character-drawing which struck the Western reader when he first discovered the Russian novel. The comedy, written in the full summer of the Golden Age, is in rhyme. So is the greatest of Pushkin's contributions to the Realistic tradition, perhaps his greatest work altogether—the novel in verse, *Evgeni Onegin*. Being a novel in verse and not a novel ('the devil of a difference', according to Pushkin), *Evgeni Onegin* contains many beautiful things that are absent from the most poetical novels of Turgenev, but, like Turgenev's novels, it is a novel of character, not of plot. Its interest is lyrical and psychological rather than narrative. The characters of Onegin and Tatiana contain in a nutshell almost all the portrait gallery of Turgenev's novels. *Onegin* was completed in 1831. After that date Pushkin, following the general trend of the times, passed to prose. Unlike *Onegin*, his novel *The Captain's Daughter*, a 'Waverley' novel, but condensed to a third of the length of one of Scott's, and his stories, of which the most famous is *The Queen of Spades*, are not stories of character, but pure stories of action. The example of Pushkin was but little followed by the Russian realists, but at least he taught them to write prose that relied for its effect exclusively on the logical quality of the thoughts expressed, not on the ornaments of style. Of all prose-writers Pushkin is most akin to Caesar.

Pushkin's tradition was carried on by Lermontov. In his great novel *The Hero of our Times* (1840) he continued the tradition of *Onegin* in his character-drawing, and of the *The Queen of Spades* in his style. But unlike Pushkin's, it is a novel of direct analysis, and in the history of analytic novels Lermontov is (together with Stendhal) a link between the older French tradition and Tolstoy.

Pushkin, Griboyedov, and Lermontov would have been sufficient to call Russian Realism into life, but as a matter of historical fact the 'Natural School' was much more affected by the example of Gogol than by that of any one else. In the traditional history of Russian literature Gogol is the founder of the Realistic novel. But applied to Gogol the word Realistic must be used with many reservations. There was a strong unrealistic strain in his genius—a strain that was at once romantic, rhetorical, and burlesque. His prose is elaborate and ornate: it is never simple like Pushkin's or Lermontov's, it is always in one of the extremes of farce or rhetoric. He chooses his subjects from the trivialities of provincial life, but he treats them in a manner very different from that of the realist. Reality is for him a material for creating grotesque forms, which, though their moral value may be different, are akin to the delightful characters of Dickens. His people are rampantly alive, but they are not real people. He has an abnormally sensitive eye for the details of real life, but he uses these realistic details to construct monsters as impossible as unicorns and griffins, which yet seem more alive than if they were real. It was his choice of subject, and the material he used, that made Gogol the paragon of realism to his admirers of 1845. They made him also the paragon of social satire and socially conscious art. And yet his satire was merely the outcome of an exuberant creative temperament, creating only grotesque and ugly figures. It made him a satirist, but this did not mean that he was in any sense opposed to the existing order of things in Russia. He never

GOGOL

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realized the social and political implications of his satire, which had originated in sheer joy of creation. But he gave the public such grotesque and Aristophanesque pictures of provincial bureaucracy that his comedy *Revizor* (*The Inspector General*) and his satirical 'epic' *Dead Souls* could not but be received as social satires. So they were, and they became the starting-point of the social literature of the Natural School.

The distinctive note of subsequent Russian Realism, with its studied simplicity and sense of proportion and restraint, is struck much more by the work of Griboyedov, Pushkin, and Lermontov than by the exuberant, elaborate, and grotesque inventions of Gogol. Dostoevsky alone of all the 'Natural School' did actually inherit some of his characteristics.

THE AGE OF THE GREAT NOVELISTS

I

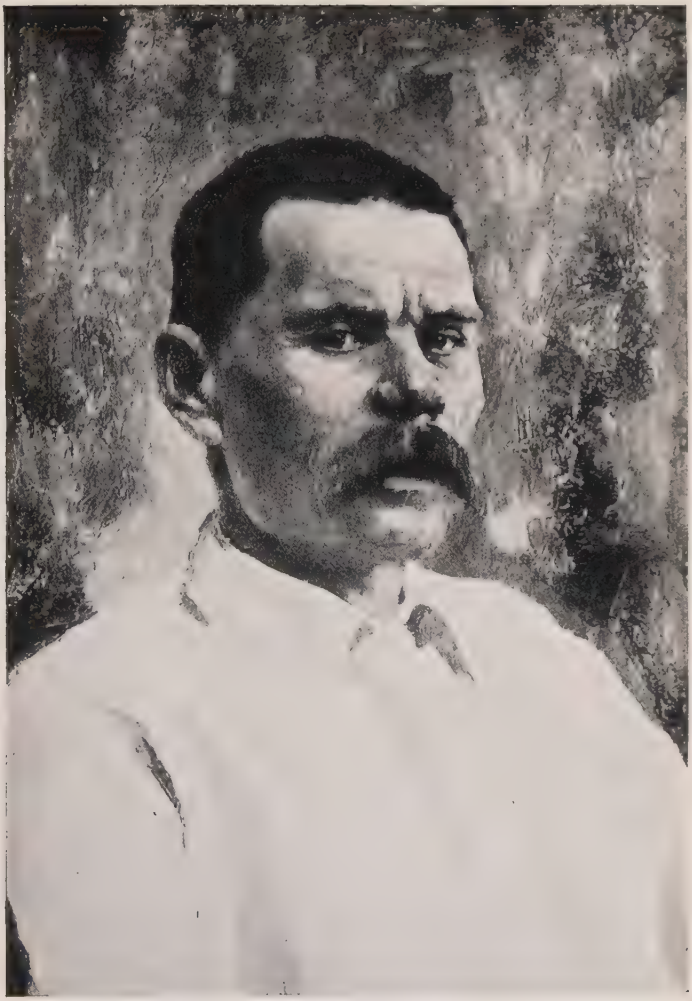
'The Natural School': Aksakov

From the first successes of the 'Natural School' in 1846 to the death of Chekhov in 1904 Russian literature was entirely dominated by the realistic novel. The drama was a mere by-form of the novel, and poetry—a backwater of secondary importance.

In the course of these sixty years the Russian novel underwent many changes and assumed many different forms, but all the work of the period has enough of common characteristics to allow us to treat the Russian novelists from Aksakov and Turgenev to Chekhov and Gorky as a single school.

One of these characteristics is a marked preponderance of character over plot. In the art of character-drawing the Russian novelists have few equals, but their narrative was often deficient, and with few exceptions they were not exactly thrilling story-tellers. They held in contempt everything smacking of 'artificial' intrigue, and tended to make their stories (and their plays) 'slices of life'. Hence the difficulty of distinguishing between fiction and autobiography.

Another important characteristic is a certain, at least apparent, disregard for style. Even a great and careful stylist like Turgenev endeavours to make his style beautiful by the absence rather than by the presence of anything striking. This tendency is traceable to the example of Pushkin and Lermontov, but not to Gogol. It may degenerate into atrocious journalese, but at its best it is full of subtle art and almost classical restraint. There was no 'fine writing' in Russia between Gogol and the Symbolists.



GORKY

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The Realism of the Russian novelist implied choosing his subject from contemporary (or almost contemporary) Russian life. Great stress was laid on the exact description of the milieu and minute truthfulness of detail. The story was meant (and expected by the critics) to have a direct bearing on the political or social problems of the day. The writer sometimes tried to shirk this onerous task, but he was invariably reminded of it by the critic; and the novel, as a more ambitious form than the short story, always recognized the obligation.

Underlying the whole work of the school, there is a definite ethical outlook. It is idealistic and humanistic in substance. It lays stress on the value of the human personality, and attaches great importance to the standards, not so much of conduct, as of conscience; for the essential ethical problems of the Russian novelists are always problems of conscience, rather than of action. It was this ethical element and the broad human sympathy of the Russian novelists that most struck the Western mind when Russian literature was revealed to it. Melchior de Vogüé's book on the Russian novel is a lasting monument of this first impression.

The pedigree of the Russian novel is traditionally traced to Gogol, and we have seen that it may be even more plausibly traced to Pushkin and to Lermontov. But foreign example played a still more important part in the rise of Russian Realism. This example was mainly French; Dickens, for all his popularity about 1845, does not appear to have exercised any appreciable influence. George Sand was the idol of the generation, and her importance in this connexion can scarcely be exaggerated. Balzac had an equally devoted, but less extensive, circle of followers, and Stendhal was an important influence in the formation of Tolstoy's art. France has more than once been the great reservoir of literary culture from which Russian literature drew fresh force, like Antaeus from Mother-Earth.

1846 was the *annus mirabilis* of the Natural School: it saw the publication of the first novels of Goncharov and of Dostoevsky, of the first of Turgenev's *Sketches of a Sportsman*, and of the first fragments of Aksakov's *Family Chronicle*. Other works, now more or less forgotten, contributed to the effect of a sudden Renaissance—problem novels by Herzen (*Whose fault?*) and Druzhinin (*Polinka Sacks*), both testifying to the influence of George Sand, and Grigorovich's stories of peasant life, where the peasant appears for the first time in literature. In 1850 appeared the first novel of Pisemsky and the first play of Ostrovsky. In 1852 Tolstoy's *Childhood* was printed. After that new stars appeared in the firmament with less startling frequency, while the welcome accorded to them ceased to be unanimous. Saltykov began his satirical career in 1857. Leskov (for years to come neglected by the critics) published his first story in 1863.

The period from the end of the Crimean War (1856) to the outbreak of the Polish Rebellion (1862) was an era of liberal reform, of great expectations and great political excitement. It was also the time when the masterpieces of Aksakov, Turgenev, Goncharov, Pisemsky, and Ostrovsky followed each other in dazzling abundance. After 1862 the older writers began to grow weary and to lose sympathy with the *intelligentsia*. Younger writers began to displace the Classics (for they had become Classics) in popular favour. But the young generation turned out to be ephemeral and ineffective, and the old had yet its best to produce. The following period is chiefly memorable for the great novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, which appeared between 1864 and 1880. This last date marks the approximate end of the Golden Age of the novel. Tolstoy's *Confession* was written in 1879 and published in 1882. Dostoevsky died in 1881, Turgenev in 1883. The field was left to inferior men, the best of whom, like Garshin or Korolenko, did not reach to the waist of the smallest of the older novelists. Russian Realism appeared to be

languishing away. But there was yet to come the wonderful Indian summer of Chekhov. Chekhov was the crest of a second and last wave in the history of Russian Realism. His death in 1904 marks the end. Before his death there had arisen a younger group of writers who about 1900 aroused great expectations, but though Gorky and Bunin have produced work of a high order, the work of this generation turned out to be but the dying echo of a great past. A new age was preluded by different voices.

The period which witnessed the rise and decline of the Russian novel was a period of radical changes in Russian life. I am not going to give any detailed account of these changes, nor do I advise the reader to reconstruct the social history of Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century from the data of Russian fiction. Realism or no realism Russian fiction is after all Art, and Art is always a creation, an invention, if you like, or a selection. It can never become the equivalent of an ordnance survey map, or, to use a more hackneyed phrase, of a photograph. But a photograph was just what Russian critics wanted. Continental and English critics have occasionally been led astray into this heresy. But it must be emphasized again and again that to reconstruct history from literature shows a lack of respect for literature and a lack of understanding of history. To judge the relations between a literary work and the society depicted in it, the critic must have a sound knowledge of the society from extra-imaginative sources.

However, a few words must be said about the very profound changes in Russian society. The great political and social event of the period was the emancipation of the serfs. And this was one of the many causes of another great social change, which had a direct bearing on literary life—the decline and gradual disappearance of that class which had produced the literature of the classical period—the landed gentry. The older generation of writers from Goncharov (born 1812) to Tolstoy (born 1828) for the most part belonged to the gentry. But the gentry had begun

to disintegrate before the middle of the century. It ceased to be the united class it had been in the days of Pushkin, and part of it was already developing into an *intelligentsia*. Only a few men of the generation (notably Tolstoy and Fet) were men with a distinct caste-consciousness. The others, including Turgenev, were more or less *déclassés*. The emancipation dealt the *coup de grâce* to the old class-forms of the gentry. It made a clean sweep of the middle layers, which formed the great majority and most active part, leaving the aristocracy isolated and unrooted. A new class, the *intelligentsia*, took the place of the gentry as the vessel of national culture. It was constituted by the more or less incomplete fusion of the educated elements of the middle gentry with the so-called *raznochintsi* (=men-of-all-ranks), self-made intellectuals, who had studied at the universities and higher schools. This *intelligentsia* is the dominant feature of Russian life between the Emancipation and the Great Revolution. Practically all the writers born after 1830 belong to it. It is a varied and fluctuating class, and its chief characteristics are an absence of deep-rooted tradition and a permanent dissatisfaction with existing conditions. It attained to its highest literary expression in the works of Chekhov.

Before we come to the generation of the forties (the men born between 1812–1828) we must turn our attention to Sergey Timofeevich Aksakov, a man of a much older generation, whose genius was revealed to him only in his old age under the influence of Gogol. This is a striking case of the peculiar nature of Gogol's influence. It is difficult to imagine two natures more unlike than Gogol's and Aksakov's. Yet it is an evident fact that his genius became conscious of itself only by the example of Gogol. Aksakov had not been able to find a suitable means of expression in the classical forms he had been brought up in. Gogol opened his eyes to the possibility of making the whole of life the subject of literary treatment.

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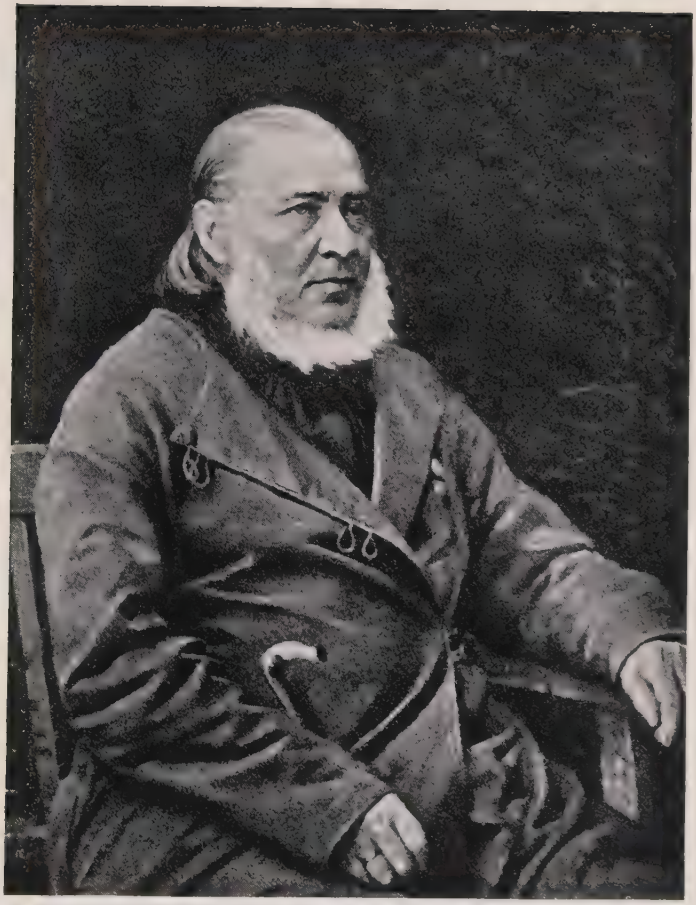

AKSAKOV

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Aksakov was born in Ufa (East Russia) in 1791. The story of his grandparents and parents is told in his *Family Chronicle*. His grandfather was a pioneering landowner who had planted his new estates in the hitherto un-Russian Bashkiria. He was an uneducated and rough provincial squire, who had no culture but a sound and simple moral code, and a tradition of family honour and dignity. But his son, the writer's father, married a girl of a totally different class. She was the educated and cultivated daughter of a high official, and a pupil of the moral philosophy of the eighteenth century. Aksakov took after his mother, and the careful and refined training she gave him developed that sensitiveness and introspection which produced *Years of Childhood* and *Recollections*. Aksakov, as his readers will remember, was in intellect and feeling an extraordinarily precocious child. He lived at home till he was eight, then he was sent to the 'gymnasium' of Kazan, the metropolis of the east of Russia. While he was there the gymnasium was expanded into a university. After taking his degree in 1807 he went to Moscow and St. Petersburg, where he was introduced into certain literary and theatrical circles, and became a staunch follower of Admiral Shishkov and of the extreme conservative and nationalist party in Literature. He married in 1815 and for ten years carried on farming in his paternal Aksakovo (the 'Bagrovo' of his books). But soon he discovered that he had no vocation for farming. In 1826 he came to Moscow, and his old friend Admiral Shishkov (then Minister of Education) found employment for him in the censorship. He remained in the Civil Service till 1839, when he retired. His family life was more than commonly happy and prosperous. His wife was a paragon of all the domestic virtues. She bore him many children, and two of his sons, Constantine and Ivan, grew up to be prominent men of letters and leaders of the Slavophil party. Soon after the first appearance of Gogol's stories Aksakov made his acquaintance, and the Aksakov's house became the

centre of that cult which played such an important part in the undoing of the great writer. Aksakov took rather a long time to 'see through' the dark and disingenuous nature of his idol, and to discover how entirely incapable he was of sincerity and friendship. But he came to realize it at last. Some of his letters to Gogol are remarkable for the straightforward and intense sincerity of his deeply wounded feelings. Still Gogol had revealed to Aksakov his latent genius, and as early as 1840 Aksakov began writing *The Family Chronicle*, under direct encouragement from Gogol. In 1846 fragments of it were published anonymously, but at first attracted little attention outside the Slavophil set. They were followed by books on Angling (1847), Bird Shooting (1852), and Sport in the Orenburg Country (1854). These produced a profound impression by their simple truth and unassuming but masterly exposition. Turgenev wrote an enthusiastic review of the second of these books, and Gogol wrote to the author: 'Your birds and your fish are more alive than my men and women.' The atmosphere was favourable for Aksakov to make a more ambitious venture and in 1856 appeared *The Family Chronicle* and *Recollections*. The reception they got was enthusiastic. Dobrolyubov, the most influential critic of the day, proclaimed Aksakov the greatest living Russian author, and he was recognized as a national classic. Encouraged by his success, he continued writing voluminously. During the last three years of his life he wrote *Years of Childhood of Bagrov's Grandson* (published 1858), a volume of Literary and Theatrical Recollections, and numerous detached reminiscences; and he began a novel *Natasha* in which he intended to tell the life story of his younger sister. In 1858 his robust health began to fail, and his last year he lived as an invalid. Still he continued writing, and died (1859) pen in hand.

Aksakov's principal books, *The Family Chronicle*, *Years of Childhood*, and *Recollections*, have within recent years been trans-

lated into English, and have met, especially *The Family Chronicle*, with considerable success and recognition. *The Family Chronicle* is no doubt the most interesting and attractive, but in *Years of Childhood* are more faithfully mirrored the author's individual idiosyncrasies. *The Family Chronicle* is the history of Aksakov's grandfather and the love story of his parents.[1] The figure of the grandfather, Stepan Mikhailovich, the pioneering squire, towers above the others in biblical proportions. With his unlimited power over his wife and children, with his numerous serfs and vast estates, he is like an Old Testament patriarch. His mentality is simple and sound ; his social ascendancy allows him to develop his large personality, but his family are reduced to a socially dependent and mentally inferior position. The figure of Stepan Mikhailovich is Aksakov's most memorable creation.

The book contains more incident and more narrative interest than its sequels, and less psychology and minute analysis, for the mentality of the persons represented is simple and primitive. Aksakov's principal quality revealed here is a wonderful objectivity, an impersonal and unbiased truthfulness. The picture he drew of serfdom could be used by the Radicals to prove how hideous and brutal it was, and by the Slavophils to prove that it was a gentle form of parental authority. *Years of Childhood* is less attractive to the general reader, and may even seem just a little tedious. It contains no incident and no narrative. It is merely the history of a little boy in the first eight years of his life, told with a wealth of observation and psychological detail. Taken as such, it is a supreme masterpiece, but a masterpiece of this kind does not appeal to every one. Aksakov in *Years of Childhood* became even more objective than in the *Family Chronicle*. The question naturally arises whether everything Aksakov wrote was

[1] Here and in *Years of Childhood* (but not in *Recollections*) the real names and place-names are changed to fictitious ones. Aksakov becomes Bagrov, and Aksakovo—Bagrovo.

really dictated by memory, and it must be answered in the negative; or rather it must be said that his memory was an imaginative and a creative memory. It possessed the rare and beautiful power of recreating the past, by developing and expanding what it had retained. However it may be, the impression produced by every line of Aksakov is one of absolute truth. His style is clear, calm, and abundant; an English translator has well applied to it the words 'lactea ubertas'. It is miles away from the exuberant, varied, and contorted style of Gogol.

Aksakov's other works are of subordinate importance. *Recollections* in its earlier parts is a direct continuation of *Years of Childhood*. In its later part it ceases to be psychological and self-centred and becomes an account of intellectual and cultural life in Kazan. It forms a transition to the reminiscences of literary life. These are interesting on account of the light they throw on the history of Russian civilization between 1810–1830. They are full of shrewd psychology, observation, and vivid expression. The memoir on Gogol, who played such an important part in Aksakov's life, is by far the most interesting and penetrating document in our possession on that extraordinary, complex, and bewildering personality.

2

From Turgenev to Leskov

The first of the great novelists to win general recognition at home and, afterwards, abroad was Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev. He was born in 1818 in the province of Orel (Central Russia). His father was a retired cavalry colonel. He married for money an heiress who was neither young nor good-looking. *First Love* is supposed to contain the portraits of Turgenev's parents. His mother's youth was made miserable by dishonest guardians. Her husband never loved her. She became a domestic tyrant, making

TURGENEV

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life intolerable to all those dependent on her—to her serfs and to her son. She had no connexions in society and Turgenev grew up alone. In 1834 he was sent to the University of St. Petersburg. There he made the acquaintance of Professor Pletnev, one of Pushkin's most intimate friends. This connexion is of importance, it is a link with the Great Age. It marks Turgenev off from all his contemporaries, and makes him as it were the depository of the best tradition in an age when tradition had few votaries. But his connexion with his elder contemporaries—the young Idealists and Radicals who became the fathers of the *intelligentsia*—was more decisive. He met with them when he went, in 1838, to Berlin to follow Hegel's philosophical course. There were many young Muscovites there attracted by German Idealism. Yet, as Turgenev said later on, what they wanted from Philosophy was everything except pure thought. Turgenev himself had little use for philosophy. But he was attracted by the idealism and aesthetic culture of these compatriots, and henceforward he became one of them—a Man of the Forties. The most prominent members of the group were the brilliant and short-lived Stankevich (1813–1840) and the famous critic Belinsky. It included all that was best and most promising among the progressive young men of the generation.

In 1840 Turgenev came back to Moscow. He took his degree, and had at one time the idea of becoming a scholar. But instead he became a poet. His verse began to appear regularly in the magazines of his friends, and in 1843 he published his first book *Parasha*, an ironical tale in verse reminiscent of Lermontov and of Byron, which was enthusiastically reviewed by Belinsky. Turgenev began to be considered as the rising hope of Russian poetry. In the next two years he published several new poems, but he soon realized that it was not in verse that he was to achieve great things. After 1846 he published no more poetry. He never allowed his early verse to be reprinted and did not like to

be reminded of it. It is not of the very highest order and of course not to be compared with his prose. Yet this poetical apprenticeship is important. Turgenev owed to it the verbal discipline and elegance which distinguishes his prose from that of his contemporaries who had never handled metre. He began writing prose in 1844, but his first few stories are immature, full of a rather obsolete romanticism, and of a certain violence of colour which is very unlike what we have come to associate with his name. These years were the hardest for him. In 1845 he met the famous singer Pauline Garcia (Mme. Viardot) and there began his hopeless and fruitless attachment to her which lasted all his life. Pauline Garcia responded with nothing better than a cool friendship. This love-affair is partly responsible for the unhappy ending of all Turgenev's love stories. Turgenev's mother strongly disapproved of his attachment to the actress, as well as of his literary activities. She stopped giving him money, and the years 1845–1848 were the only period of his life that he spent in something like poverty. In 1848 she died, leaving him a considerable fortune.

In 1846 Turgenev published the first of his *Sportman's Sketches* (*Khor and Kalinych*). It appeared in a periodical, Nekrasov's *Sovremennik*, in an inconspicuous place, and at first attracted little attention. Sketches continued to appear in the *Sovremennik*, and in 1852 they were collected into a book, which produced a sensation and placed Turgenev in the very first rank of Russian writers. In these sketches (hardly any one of them can be called a story) Turgenev's genius reached its full stature. He never again wrote anything quite as perfect as, for instance, *Bezhin Meadow*—' the chapter (to quote Henry James) in which he spends a warm summer night lying on the grass listening to the small boys who are sent out to watch the horses at pasture, as they sit chattering to each other of hobgoblins and fairies ; and the truly beautiful description of a singing match between two ragged peasants

(*The Singers*). The latter is simply a perfect poem.' From the point of view of absolute, all-round perfection this last story is perhaps the crowning glory of Russian prose. Turgenev never wrote anything more concentratedly beautiful.

Besides their matchless artistic perfection the *Sportman's Sketches* are supposed to have had a great historical importance as anti-Serfdom propaganda. They are said to have made a decisive impression on the future Emperor Alexander II, and thus to be an indirect cause of the Emancipation. But this aspect of the book has been grossly exaggerated. The political impression it produced only 'testifies (to quote Henry James again) to no small culture on the part of Russian readers. For never, surely, was a work of polemic bearing more consistently low in tone'. The truth is that the unprejudiced reader cannot possibly discern any 'polemic bearing' at all. It needed all the high-strung nervousness of Russian society, developed by the unlimited despotism of Nicholas I's last years, to notice the very unobtrusive 'social' note. The period of extreme reaction lasted from the Revolutionary year of 1848 to the death of the Emperor Nicholas in 1855. Turgenev, though in a much lesser degree than Dostoevsky, was to become one of its victims. When in 1852 Gogol died Turgenev wrote an obituary notice in which he spoke in terms of boundless enthusiasm of his satirical genius. For this article he was banished to his estate, where he had to remain for about eighteen months. In this involuntary isolation he wrote a series of stories, all of which are among his best, including that wonderful masterpiece *The Backwater*.

In 1853 he was allowed to return to St. Petersburg. He became a central figure in the literary world. Together with Nekrasov and Annenkov he wellnigh ruled Russian literature. In poetry especially his influence amounted to a dictatorship: the poems of both the greatest poets of the day, Tyutchev and Fet, used to be amended and 'corrected' by Turgenev before they were allowed to see the press.

In 1855 the reign of Nicholas I came to an end. With the new reign began a new age—the Age of Reforms, which was also to be the golden age of Turgenev's popularity. In 1856 he published the first of his longer novels, *Rudin*. This was followed by a *House of Gentlefolk* (1858), *On the Eve* (1860), and *Fathers and Sons* (1862). In between he wrote a few shorter stories, two of which, *Asya* and *First Love*, are among his most lasting masterpieces. The longer novels were all of them more or less 'novels with a purpose' and had a direct bearing on the problems of the day. Turgenev was certainly influenced by the critics, who demanded that novelists should present in their works a creative synthesis of what was going on around them. The novelist, according to Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov, was to be an epitomizer of current history, and Turgenev conscientiously applied himself to the task. When he was not on his best civic behaviour he was promptly reminded of his duty. When *Asya* was published—a purely human and unpolitical love-story—Chernyshevsky wrote a critique which transformed it into an allegory of burning actuality. But in the longer novels the critics had no difficulty in finding the 'social meaning'. In *Rudin*, for instance, Turgenev represented the type of the eloquent but ineffective *révolté* of the forties. In *A House of Gentlefolk* he distilled all that was best in the old conservative civilization of the gentry into the beautiful figure of Liza. In *On the Eve* he tried to draw the character of an efficient revolutionary, the counterpart to *Rudin*. He made his hero, Insarov, a Bulgarian. This led the critics to declare that in Turgenev's opinion Russia was incapable of producing men of action. His answer to the critics was *Fathers and Sons*, the last of the series. *On the Eve* is the most 'civic' and the least attractive of Turgenev's novels. Its beauty has faded, and even the heroic Elena lacks the charm of Turgenev's other heroines. *Fathers and Sons* is also civic in conception, but unlike *On the Eve*, Turgenev somehow succeeded in making it a master-

piece, which has not faded and probably never will. The hero is the 'nihilist' (the word is of Turgenev's coinage), materialist, and atheist Bazarov, a 'strong silent man'. Turgenev most obviously drew him with love and sympathy. The Radicals, however, took exception to Bazarov and proclaimed him an impertinent caricature. But soon there came up a new set of younger and extremer Radicals who gloried in their atheism and materialism and in their contempt for art and beauty. They accepted Bazarov as a portrait of themselves, recognized him as their ideal, and took up the name of Nihilists. Turgenev had out-radicalled the older radicals and prophetically painted a type which at the time he wrote had not yet come into existence. This flair for the immediate future has been much emphasized by the commentators of Turgenev and in the eyes of *intelligentsia* criticism it has become his chief *titre de noblesse*. But it did not make up for the first bad reception of the novel. This first reception had a strong effect on Turgenev. He was over-sensitive to popularity and hated being 'out of the movement'. He never quite recovered from the wound. He stayed abroad, and only came back to Russia for short visits. He expressed his profound disappointment in a prose-poem, *Enough*, so ruthlessly and unkindly parodied by Dostoevsky in *The Possessed*.

Turgenev settled abroad, first at Baden-Baden and afterwards at Bougival, near Paris. He became practically an *émigré*, and lost touch with the Russian soil. His next novel, *Smoke* (1867), is a novel of Russian life abroad—the scene is at Baden-Baden. It is the least perfect of his novels. In it he quite irrelevantly combined one of his best love-stories with a satirical representation of Russian society at Baden-Baden. He satirizes both the reactionary *noblesse* and the radical *émigrés*, and the book is full of bitterness. Turgenev continued writing short stories, which though they include such masterpieces as *Torrents of Spring* and *A Lear of the Steppes*, passed comparatively unnoticed. They are

all retrospective and deal with Russian life before the Reforms. In 1877 he published his last novel, *Virgin Soil*, once again taking up a civic theme—the revolutionary propaganda of the Populists [1] among the peasants. It appeared a few weeks before the outbreak of the Turkish war and failed to create a sensation. But though almost everything he wrote after 1862 met with a lukewarm reception, his reputation was very far from waning. His earlier work from *A Sportsman's Sketches* to *Fathers and Sons* had passed beyond the reach of praise or blame. Turgenev had become a classic and he was generally recognized as the greatest living Russian writer (Tolstoy was as yet fully appreciated only by a very few). Turgenev's last visit to Russia, in 1880, turned into a triumphant progress and largely made up for the bitterness caused by the Radicals twenty years earlier.

During these last years Turgenev was more and more pessimistic and haunted by the idea of death. He was attracted for a time by spiritualism in its rather crude 'Victorian' forms (*Clara Milich*), but his last work, the short fragments known as *Poems in Prose*, gives full expression to his joyless fatalism and unbelief. He died in 1883, in Bougival.

For the English reader there can be no more attractive account of Turgenev's personality than Henry James's delightful essay included in *Partial Portraits*. The great American was fascinated by the charm of the Russian, and speaks of him in terms of unstinted admiration. In Russian accounts Turgenev is given a far less attractive character. There can be no doubt that he was more cordial, more sincere, more generous, and more simple with foreigners than with Russians. Foreigners, for instance, have often dwelt on his intense patriotism, while to all Russians he appeared as a fastidious cosmopolitan, who sneered at his native country. He made friends with French novelists, but not with his Russian compeers. Only those could be his friends who

[1] See p. 76.

submitted to his superiority without murmuring like the gentle and modest poet Polonsky. Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Nekrasov, were all sooner or later compelled to quarrel with him. Fet was the only man who remained friends with him on terms of equality. But Fet was a man of infinite reserve and singularly self-contained. On the other hand, there was something unmanly both in his dealings with women and in his excessive sensitiveness to what the Radicals and the younger generation thought of him. In politics he was a consummate trimmer; and even those who happened to share his views disliked their Laodicean tepidness. He has not inspired his biographers with that hero-worship which is so easily kindled in a biographer. But no one has doubted his great intellect, and all who knew him testify to the inimitable charm of his conversation.

Long before his death Turgenev acquired a European fame. He was translated into and written about in French, German, and English.[1] He was an important figure in the French literary world of the day; on friendly terms with Flaubert, and recognized as a master by younger men like Daudet and Maupassant. And when he died his funeral oration was delivered by Renan. It was about or soon after his death that his fame reached its high-water mark both at home and abroad (Melchior de Vogüé, *Le Roman Russe*, 1885). Since then it has been eclipsed by that of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (in this country perhaps even by that of Chekhov); but it is because their fame has grown, not because Turgenev's has diminished. He is safe in his splendour, which, in Russia at least, shows no signs of waning.

Turgenev lacked the enormous creative power of Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, their vitality and their deadly earnest intensity, but he had other qualities which neither of his greater contemporaries possessed. First of all, his beautiful caressing Russian. His prose, at its best, produces an almost physical effect of intoxicating

[1] Henry James's first essay was published in 1876.

beauty. His language is very much his own creation. He broke away from all literary traditions, from the neat analytical style of Pushkin and Lermontov, as well as from the exuberant eloquence of Gogol. Compared with what came before him, his style is cunningly and consistently colloquial, elaborately natural, and laboriously unliterary. It is inimitable and perfect as long as he keeps it fresh and renewed. It becomes insipid and stale as soon as the suspicion of a cliché arises. When he speaks of Nature and Landscape he almost invariably keeps it fresh. But in the direct description of sentiment he very often sinks into the rut of self-imitation. His pitfalls are the false-beautiful and the languid. Nothing can be more insipid than the sentiments of the ideal heroine Elena in *On the Eve*.

This danger of the false-beautiful lies in the very nature of Turgenev's method. It is not analytical—it is what one might call poetical or suggestive: he does not describe the feelings of his characters, but tries to produce an atmosphere of sympathy, and to evoke in the reader responsive emotions by purely emotional means. In this he differs from Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, but comes very near to Chekhov. It may be contended that his poetical effects are less perfect and successful than Chekhov's, and it is certain that he could never attain to that unity of composition which is the great strength of the younger master.

What most modern readers will dislike in Turgenev is his 'humour'. It is neither the loud honest laugh of Dickens, nor the kind, contemptuously sympathetic smile of Chekhov—it is a sneer, often unmanly and always self-conscious. Another feature of Turgenev's which is quite out of tune with our tastes is his conversations on social and intellectual topics. Usually they are *hors d'œuvres* quite unassimilated to the body of the story. They are pieces of indifferent journalism painfully encrusted on a beautiful fabric. Here again he is poles apart from both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, whose conversations are never

irrelevant, and carry on the main impulse of the story. Like most Russian novelists, Turgenev is first of all a great creator of characters. They have not the absolute reality of Tolstoy's people nor the intense fantastic vividness of Dostoevsky's. They are on a more conventional and more artistic plane. His art of character-painting goes back to Pushkin—it is in the tradition of *Evgeni Onegin*.

Conversation has little and analysis no part in the shaping of his personages. Their individuality is produced by the subtle and elusive methods of atmosphere. Turgenev's best and most memorable characters, with the notable exception of Bazarov, are his women, especially his young girls—Liza in a *House of Gentlefolk*, Asya, the heroine of the *Backwater*. There is certainly an element of poetical or romantic idealism in these creations and perhaps just a little lack of backbone. But if Turgenev had not created Bazarov, they would have remained his principal claim to equality with the great Russian novelists. Bazarov is something of a miracle—so isolated and unexpected is he in the midst of Turgenev's portrait gallery. But he is also after all a creation of atmosphere, and his individuality lies in the subtle halo of tragedy woven round him by the cunning poet rather than in the ' strong-silentness ' of his character.

One of the eminent French admirers of Turgenev compared his work with Greek Tragedy. This is of course too complimentary. Turgenev's conception of the human universe is the typical decadent nineteenth-century conception, it is a world of human weakness and blind chance. Irreligious (but not courageous enough to be an atheist) and passive, Turgenev could but be a pessimist, and his pessimism is relieved only by the romantic visions of love and beauty, beautiful, fleeting, frail things, veiling from the unwilling eye the dreadful abysses of Nonentity. But there is not in Turgenev an ounce of the active, manly, fearless pessimism of Thomas Hardy. The unhappy ending of all

Turgenev's stories has been often noted. It is of course first of all a literary convention, a mannerism if you like, but a convention and a mannerism highly characteristic of the man and of his age. A happy ending was to Turgenev something incredibly vulgar. Like Renan and Chekhov, he despised success. The great majority of his heroes do not deserve success, but twice in his career he created or tried to create, under the stimulus of external forces, men who deserved it—Insarov in *On the Eve* and Bazarov. Bazarov, of course as he was created by Turgenev, not as he was imagined by the younger Radicals, was not at all a deserver of success; he was called into existence just to be broken down by Ananke—a brave little mouse to be played with by the great merciless Cat of Destiny—like the brave little sparrow in one of the *Poems in Prose*. Consequently he is a great creation in the true spirit of his creator. Bazarov's unhappy end is in complete harmony with the whole conception. Insarov, the strong Bulgarian of *On the Eve*, transcended the power of Turgenev. He is ludicrously inadequate. He is of course meant to 'deserve success' and there is no reason in the world (except in Turgenev's world) why he should not command it. But to succeed would have been to become a philistine. To let him be victorious would have been (aesthetically) to kill him. It would have been a grave breach of courtesy on the part of the author. So he has the privilege of suddenly falling ill and dying in the very appropriate scenery of Venice, and is thus unexpectedly redeemed from the abomination of success. *On the Eve* is the worst of Turgenev's works. No one will call it a good novel. But nowhere is it easier to lay the finger on the mainsprings of Turgenev's effeminate, romantic, and aesthetic pessimism. This effeminate and passive pessimism has been supposed to be typically Russian; Renan, a fellow pessimist, spoke to this effect in his eloquent funeral oration. As a matter of fact, it is typical of the Cosmopolitan Europe of the nineteenth century, and Renan himself is at least

as eminent a spokesman of it. It is also typical of the dying civilization of the gentry and the Hamlet-like generation of the forties. It was this heritage that was taken up by the still more decadent *intelligentsia*—in the work of its greatest writer, Chekhov.

For the general reader at home, and especially abroad, Turgenev has eclipsed all the other novelists of his generation, except the major lights of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. But before the writers of that age were finally pigeon-holed according to their respective importance, the table of precedence had been otherwise. A critic writing about 1862 might mention Tolstoy and Dostoevsky among the second rank of writers, reserving the first places for Turgenev and Goncharov, without any sense of incongruity. It was a long time before Goncharov was displaced from a position of equality with Turgenev. To this day the analysis of his novels is inflicted on Russian schoolboys and schoolgirls at even greater length than that of Turgenev's. But if the schoolmaster sticks to him, the reader has abandoned him, for the good reason that, whatever other qualities they may have, his novels are distinctly tedious. Yet the historian cannot abandon him so lightly and must reserve for him a very prominent place, a place of honour even, for of all Russian writers Goncharov is most representative of the peculiar idiosyncrasies of the Russian school of fiction.

The life of Ivan Aleksandrovich Goncharov was uninteresting and uneventful. He was born in 1812 in Simbirsk (on the middle Volga), of a wealthy merchant family who had adopted the mode of life and culture of the gentry. He studied at Moscow, and passed most of his life in St. Petersburg, in the Civil Service. The only incident in his life worth mentioning is his voyage to Japan in 1854–1855, which he described in *The Frigate Pallada*. The only other events are the publications of his three novels: *A Common Story* in 1847, *Oblomov* in 1858, and *The Precipice* in 1869. He died in 1891.

Of his novels the most famous is *Oblomov*, which appeared in the same year as *A House of Gentlefolk*. It produced a greater sensation than any single one of Turgenev's novels. It became the special favourite of the critics, for it realized all they demanded from a novel. It may be taken as the type of the Russian novel, in which all its peculiarities, as enumerated in the beginning of this chapter, are most fully developed. It is very long, has four parts, and contains some 250,000 words. Goncharov took about ten years writing it. It is the life-story of a Russian gentleman, Ilya Oblomov, who is made to be the incarnation of sloth and conscious inefficiency, coupled with no mean amount of intellect and talent. The subject made it a splendid springboard for the exercise of critical eloquence, and it was no doubt written with a very distinct view of creating a synthetic and comprehensive symbol of a certain aspect of Russian life. It is not exhilarating reading, but it is very powerful, a work of genius, and in its way a perfect work of art. It is indeed convincingly symbolic and synthetic, and the gradual growth of the inevitable doom of the *unfit* man is developed with a cunning and unerring hand. The general impression is overpowering, almost elemental. The passive sloth and slovenly weakness of Oblomov looms on the reader as a sort of superhuman entity, a terrible grey, unclean and sticky monster. This effect is achieved without the smallest falling off from a strictly realistic standard, and is for that reason doubly effective. The novel is the crowning glory of what Miss Harrison has very aptly called the 'imperfective' style in literature. The name of Oblomov has given rise to the word Oblomovshchina—'Oblomovdom'—which, to quote Miss Harrison, 'means the imperfective state incarnate'. 'Oblomov', she goes on to say, 'is the incarnation of what the Russian calls *khalatnost*, the quality of dressing-gownness. Oblomov's dressing-gown is described with loving appreciative detail. It is a big, soft, roomy, Asiatic dressing-gown, easy to get into, almost impossible to get

out of. It haunts the book like an Ibsen symbol. It stands for the impossibility of being "well-groomed", physically and mentally'.

Goncharov's remaining two novels are less significant. *The Common Story* is a series of more or less disconnected episodes contrasting, with mathematical elegance, the mentality of a romantic youth and of his practical uncle, and ending in the romantic youth becoming a practical business-man. *The Precipice* contains much first-class character-drawing and a charming description of old-world country-town life. It has more narrative interest than *Oblomov*, but it lacks the superior touch of genius. In all the most pathetic and thrilling parts it is 'just wrong', and altogether it belongs to the second best.

A writer very unlike both Goncharov and Turgenev was Aleksey Theofilaktovich Pisemsky (1820–1881). In the great days of the social novel he was invariably quoted as third in a trio which included the other two. If Goncharov is supremely typical of, Pisemsky stands outside the main current of Russian fiction. He lacks two of the main features of the 'Russian School' —the ethical foundation and the neglect of plot. He is more akin to Balzac than to any one of his Russian contemporaries. As a mere story-teller he excels all Russian novelists except Leskov. His principal drawback is his style, which lacks art and distinction and in his later work degenerates into the ugliest journalese. Even in his best period (1850–1860) it is just inoffensive. His first story, *The Muff* (1850), is perhaps his best. It is very gloomy and lacks the idealism of Turgenev, but it is gloomy in the way Balzac is gloomy, not in the way Goncharov is. His longest work is the powerful novel *A Thousand Souls* which appeared 1858. It is the story of a brilliant, unscrupulous, but honest *arriviste*. It is somewhat less consistently pessimistic in its view of humanity, for it is relieved by the charming, delicately painted and entirely unidealized figure of the heroine Nastya.

Unlike most Russian novels, but like Balzac's, its plot is based on a business affair, and it abounds in thrilling interest of the Balzacian type. Besides stories of 'educated' life, Pisemsky wrote stories of the people, like the *Petersburgher* and *The Carpenters*. They contain wonderfully powerful studies of the strong and passionate type of Russians of the uneducated classes; there is in these stories a forecast of Leskov. Elsewhere I shall have to mention Pisemsky as the author of the best realistic tragedy in the Russian language.

Pisemsky's stories of 'popular' life may introduce us to the provincial ethnographical novel which flourished side by side with the 'genteel' or *intelligentsia* novel of Turgenev and Goncharov. Few of the provincial novelists rise above mediocrity, but one should mention Andrey Pechersky (pseud. of P. I. Melnikov, 1819–1883), author of two four-volume novels about Old Believers,[1] *In the Woods* and *On the Hills*. They contain some good character-drawing and an immense wealth of observation of this singularly conservative community. Nadezhda Kokhanovsky (pseud. of Mme. Sokhansky, 1825–1884), in her stories of the life of the Little-Russian steppe gentry, reveals a very personal strain of sentimental humour. Her best stories deal with the rough and picturesque provincial life of the eighteenth century, and deserve a place by themselves, independent of, but complementary to Aksakov.

In the novels of Turgenev, as distinct from his shorter stories, and of Goncharov, there is an appreciable amount of journalism. In *Fathers and Sons*, in *Rudin*, and in *Oblomov* it is welded into an organic unity with the imaginative core; but in a less perfect work, like *Smoke*, the journalistic element stands apart and is as distinct from the main creative stream of the novel as oil is from water.

[1] Dissenters who refused to accept certain new rites and customs introduced in the Russian Church about 1660.

In this compulsory introduction of themes of actuality into imaginative work there lay the germ of a development that was not slow to follow. Fiction took a decided turn towards journalism. It began to dispense with the discipline and conventions of the narrative form and tended to become mere typical description with a purpose. This tendency is best illustrated in the work of Michael Evgrafovich Saltykov (1826–1889), who wrote under the pseudonym of N. Shchedrin. Himself a member of the gentry and for many years an important provincial official, he devoted his talents to satirizing the Russian bureaucracy in all its aspects, and combating the conservative policy of the landowning class, undermined but not abolished by the Emancipation. Later on he added to his enemies the new *parvenu* and unprincipled *bourgeoisie* created by the capitalistic excitement that followed the Reforms. His first satirical sketches appeared in 1857. He continued producing them till his death. Towards the end of his life, especially after the death of Nekrasov, he became the principal spokesman of Russian Radicalism. His sketches, it must be confessed, offer little to attract any one to-day. His earlier work is amusing, but it lacks not only the higher qualities of genius, but also sufficient moral earnestness to make up for its lack of distinction. By a curious irony of fate his *Provincial Sketches* and his *History of a Town* (a witty burlesque of the history of Russia) became the favourite reading of the official class satirized in them. His later sketches are more serious, but less readable. They are full of obscure allusions to wholly forgotten topics. On a higher level are his *Fables* (*Skazki*) where he achieves a greater degree of artistic concision; some of them are delightfully epigrammatic and pointed. His last work is *Old Times in Poshekhonye*, a very tendentious but vastly planned synthetic picture of the Russian gentry in the times of serfdom. Saltykov would remain a secondary figure in Russian literary history were it not for one book, his only regular novel, *The Golovlev Family*, which

places him on a level with the very greatest. Like so many Russian novels, it is the story of the undoing of a life, or rather of a whole family, and it is saturated with a more than ordinary gloominess. It is like *Poshekhonye*, the 'natural history' of a family of landowners. The picture it offers of the bestiality, meanness, moral and intellectual poverty of the Golovlev family is unilluminated by a single redeeming ray. For consistent gloom the book has no equal—*Wuthering Heights* is cheerful compared with it; but in its kind, of cruel literature it is a masterpiece, and allows us to place its author in the first rank of Russian novelists.

After 1860 a new generation of *raznochintsi* ('men-of-all-ranks') came forward and occupied the literary stage. The first of these was Nikolay Gerasimovich Pomyalovsky (1835–1863) who sprang into popularity through a series of depressingly gloomy pictures of life in the ecclesiastical schools. He was a man of considerable talent, and his unfinished novel *Brother and Sister* contains much that makes one regret his early death. But his *School Sketches* are after all mere descriptive journalism. His contemporaries followed him and Saltykov in turning fiction into journalism. The most famous writer of the group in his own day was Gleb Uspenski (1840–1902), a man of great gifts and unusually delicate moral sensitiveness. But the formlessness, prolixity, and excessive 'actuality' of his descriptive sketches have made them unreadable. There were other men of promise in the generation; they experimented in form and tried to cast aside the conventions of fiction, but they had too little culture for anything to come of their experiments. On the whole the generation born between 1828 (birth of Tolstoy) and 1860 (birth of Chekhov) was remarkably poor in literary achievement, if compared with either the preceding or the following generations. This is partly made up for by the fact that it produced the greatest generation of Russian composers—including Chaikovsky, Musorg-

sky, and Rimsky-Korsakov. There is one writer of the generation who deserves mention, this is Nikolay Afanasievich Kushchevski (1847–1876), a young Siberian who failed in life and died of drink. But his only novel, *Nicholas Negorev or the happy Russian* (1871), is a perfectly delightful book, which holds its own even when compared with the greatest. It is a story of schoolboys' and students' life in the fifties. His characters are wonderfully alive. His humour is deliciously fresh and he has a beautiful lightness of touch which is unique among the somewhat bear-like geniuses of Russian literature.

Midway between the great old men and the inferior younger generation, his work resembling neither, stands Nikolay Semenovich Leskov. He was born in 1831, in Orel, and his descent was also mixed: his mother was a gentlewoman, his father a priest's son. His early years passed under mixed influences, among which that of an English Quaker friend of the family was conspicuous. Leskov, unlike almost every other Russian writer, did not study at a university, and did not enter the government service. He was for many years agent for a Mr. Scott, an Englishman who was chief steward of a nobleman's large estate. In this employment Leskov came into contact with all classes of people and learned to know them from an angle other than that of the official and landed classes. This to a certain extent explains the great originality of his writings and of his vision of Russian life. He began writing late. His first story appeared in 1863. He was at one time very unpopular with the Radicals, even boycotted by them. But he was not a reactionary. He had his own ideas on things and they did not fit in with any party programme. The critics took scant notice of him, but the reading public soon began to value him at his just worth. Some of his stories were much appreciated in Court circles, especially by the Empress Marie Alexandrovna, Alexander II's consort, and he was given a sinecure in the Civil Service; but he left it when he found

himself in disagreement with the Government. In his later years he came under the influence of the ideas of Tolstoy, but as a writer he always remained amazingly original. He died in 1895.

Leskov's best-known work is *Soboryane* (in English the title is *Cathedral Folk*), which has been translated into English and has caused its author to be rather inappropriately dubbed 'a Russian Trollope'. It is a very good book, full of humour and excellent character-drawing. It is 'imperfective' in scheme, but the author's personality asserts itself in the introduction of purely anecdotic matter. The chief character, Deacon Akhilla, and the Archpriest Tuberozov, a strong and righteous but meticulous man, are among the most memorable in the portrait gallery of Russian fiction.

But *Soboryane* is not typical of Leskov, precisely on account of its 'imperfectiveness'. For Leskov is the most purely narrative of all Russian novelists. He is a great story-teller, in fact the greatest of Russian story-tellers. Many a story of his contains more wealth of incident than the whole of Turgenev and Goncharov. Such stories as the *Enchanted Wanderer* or the *Sealed Angel* have a wonderfully rapid narrative development sustained with consummate skill, and are very unlike the ordinary conception of Russian fiction. Some are mere anecdotes, but told with the skill that makes them great literature. Some are uproariously funny, full of preposterous puns and extraordinary slang, invented on the spur of the moment. There is nothing more farcical than the story of *The Left-handed Smith of Tula* and his adventures in England. Others are concentrated tragedies, something after the manner of Stendhal's Italian Nouvelles. The tragedies are violent, based on the passions of simple but strongly feeling men and women, who are easily roused to violent action. His Russian characters, a foretaste of whom is to be found in some of Pisemsky's stories, are poles apart from the Russians of Turgenev, Tolstoy, or Chekhov. There is no morbidity in Leskov's heroes, and no undue analysis or psychology in his

method. All the psychology is conveyed by direct action. But Leskov has the deep-rooted ethical background of the Russian novelists, and he loves to bring forward the generosity and charity of the simple and humble in contrast to the great and clever. Leskov is one of the most Russian of Russian writers, though he may not answer to the English idea of what is Russian. He has a greater and fuller knowledge of the Russian character and an infinitely wider range of observation than any other single Russian writer. He knows all classes, from the highest to the very outcasts —vagabonds, convicts, tramps. The class later on 'discovered' by Gorky had been treated by Leskov with greater truth and intense sympathy. He knows all the extremes of sanctity and crime, nor does he neglect the middle layers of humdrum virtue and vulgar vice. He is in fact the most comprehensive epitome of the complex and many-sided Russian life in the mid-nineteenth century. His stories are also a treasure-house of the raciest and richest Russian: the narratives are usually put into the mouth of one of the characters and Leskov richly avails himself of the occasion to unfold an astounding fertility of verbal invention and a peerless mastery of his mother tongue. In his later years under the influence of Tolstoy he turned to a different style and wrote stories of early Christian life. Meant for a moral end, they rather miss it, in spite of the author's sound moral sense—they are too attractively told—the narrative is too captivating, and the picture he unfolds of late Roman Antioch and Alexandria too glowingly picturesque and pagan to leave much place for edification. But his methods are infinitely remote from those of the ordinary historical novelists, for he succeeds in assimilating the naïve spirit of the Byzantine hagiologists.

Very popular from the outset with the public, Leskov was long neglected by the critics. Recently there has been a great revival of interest in his work. Many modern novelists try to imitate the raciness of his Russian. But his best qualities, and most of all

the manly and vigorous directness of his narrative, remain as yet unassimilated. In a better understanding of Leskov there lies much promise of a revival of Russian fiction.

3

Dostoevsky and Tolstoy

It is customary to couple these two names together, and the custom is on the whole justified. The two are comparable not only in size (they were head and shoulders above the rest of their contemporaries) but also in kind. They were both masters of the *psychological* novel. They were both passionately interested in the essential problems of life, death and God, and both endeavoured to create a system of moral and social philosophy on a religious foundation. For the literary historian they are of greater interest as novelists than as moralists; but even apart from their imaginative work they were both (though in an unequal degree) great writers, and Tolstoy the greatest master of non-narrative Russian prose.

Though all novelists have to do with the feelings and emotions of their characters, the peculiarity of the psychological novelist is that his method of dealing with them is intellectual—the method of direct description and analysis—and introspective: he is assumed to know everything that is going on inside them. The ordinary type of novelist, like Scott or Dickens, is concerned with the feelings of his heroes only in so far as they express themselves in speech or action; while the poetical novelist, like Turgenev or Chekhov, conveys them by the indirect way of sympathetic suggestion. Tolstoy's method is purely analytical;

Dostoevsky's is purely analytical only in monologues, like *Memoirs from Underground*. In his big novels it is largely dramatic—the speeches being the main means of revealing their inner life.

The psychological novel is not an indigenous Russian growth. Its pedigree goes back to the seventeenth and eighteenth century, to the novels of Mme. de Lafayette, to Samuel Richardson, and the *Confessions* of Rousseau. In the first half of the nineteenth century the French tradition was carried on by Benjamin Constant, and reached its fullest expression in the towering genius of Stendhal. In Russia Lermontov is closely connected with this French tradition. Aksakov, on the other hand, with his manner at once broad and detailed, stands apart from the main current, but is related by way of the sentimental training he received from his mother with the older tradition of the eighteenth century. Tolstoy is a direct successor of the French analysts. He acknowledged his debt to Rousseau and Stendhal. But he carried their method further and to greater perfection. Dostoevsky's kinship is much less clear. His direct master in the art of fiction was Balzac, and to a lesser extent Gogol and Dickens, neither of whom was a psychologist. His psychology was largely his own creation, one of the genuinely original novelties in the history of Literature.

In Tolstoy and Dostoevsky—and in Stendhal—the psychological novel of the nineteenth century reaches its high-water mark. Their pupils did not rise to their level. Only within the last years have we seen another novelist of comparable psychological power and equal originality—the great and perverse Frenchman, Marcel Proust.

Though Tolstoy was the first to gain general recognition, and his influence began to spread earlier than Dostoevsky's, we have only to compare their dates to see that priority in time belongs to Dostoevsky, and that consequently it is right to begin with

him, though in the history of literary taste he may come second. Dostoevsky was seven years older than Tolstoy. His novels were published from 1846 to 1880, Tolstoy's from 1852 to 1911 (*Hadji Murat*). Tolstoy's moral and social propaganda begins where Dostoevsky's finishes—the dates are respectively 1861–1881 and 1882–1910.

Theodore Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was born on 30 October 1821 in Moscow, where his father was a doctor in one of the big municipal hospitals. They were fairly well off, and when Dostoevsky was nine his father bought a small property and thus became a land and serf owner. But for all that, the family was plebeian, and Dostoevsky felt the social difference separating him from Turgenev or Tolstoy. In 1838 he was sent, together with his elder brother Michael, to the Military Engineers' School in St. Petersburg. He obtained his commission in 1841, but in 1844 he left the service.

He came under the influence of the Westernizing Radicals and, like them, passionately admired George Sand, and Fourier, and Gogol as interpreted by Belinsky. His faith was in Socialism and Humanitarianism, or, as it was then called, Philanthropy. He was an indefatigable reader, and he early began to write. By the end of 1845 he had completed *Poor Folk*, a novel in the style of Gogol, and intensely philanthropic in feeling. When Belinsky and Nekrasov read the manuscript, they declared that 'a new Gogol was born to us'. The success was immediate and Dostoevsky sprang into sudden fame. But there were more things in Dostoevsky than were dreamt of in the philosophy of Belinsky, and after his first dazzling success there began a period of misunderstanding between the novelist and his critics. Dostoevsky was groping for themes and new ways of expression, and he was by no means inclined to write to the dictation of Belinsky. His second novel, *The Double*, disappointed the critics and met with derision. It is a most powerful production, combining the

DOSTOEVSKY

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elaborate verbal art of Gogol with a hitherto unheard of depth and detail of analysis. It described a mental state verging on and developing into insanity. It is a poem in prose (the sub-heading is *A Poem of Petersburg*) and at the same time a clinical study. Dostoevsky's great sensitiveness and self-consciousness, so curiously akin to that of his hero, was cruelly wounded and exasperated by the reception of his new masterpiece by critics who had just exalted to the clouds a less perfect work, and he quarrelled with his literary friends of the moment. He continued writing tale after tale. They all met with coldness or irony. It is true that he had not yet quite found himself, and it was not easy to seize the general trend of these unusual and startling stories. Besides, except *The Double*, which, judged by its own standards, is a masterpiece, all the work of this period is distinctly immature, untidy, and formless. But it included such powerful productions as *The Landlady*, with its passionate romance, and *Netochka Nezvanova*, an unfinished and rough torso of immense significance, almost foreshadowing the great depths of Dostoevsky's subsequent psychological adventures.

Meanwhile he had become a member of the Socialist circle of Petrashevsky. These Socialists were very peacefully disposed, and distinctly hostile to all 'bourgeois' radicalism. At first they were viewed with toleration by the Government. But then came 1848; Nicolas I was alarmed by the Revolution, and a period of extreme reaction began which lasted to the end of his reign. All the members and friends of the Petrashevsky circle, including Dostoevsky, were arrested. Most of them, after a prolonged court martial, were sentenced to death. On 21 December 1849 they were brought to the scaffold, went through all the preparations made for the execution, and only at the last moment their reprieve was announced to them. Dostoevsky's sentence was commuted to four years of hard labour in Siberia. He served it in the convict prison of Omsk, so memorably described by him

in the *House of Death*. This terrible ordeal did not embitter Dostoevsky, nor did it break him. It was to him a purgatory from which he emerged morally fortified and purified. But his nervous system was severely shattered, and the fits of epilepsy he was subject to became more frequent. In 1854 his term of hard labour ended and he was transferred to Semipalatinsk, where he was to serve at first as a private soldier. In 1855 his commission was restored to him, and before long he was allowed to leave the service, but he lived in Siberia for over nine years, and it was only in 1859 that he was finally pardoned.

In the years following his return to civilized life Dostoevsky wrote *Memoirs from the House of Death*, a work embodying his experience of convict life. It won him general admiration and was during his life always regarded as his principal claim to immortality. About the same time he wrote two more novels. One is *Stepanchikovo and its Inhabitants* (in the English translation *A Friend of the Family*), a subtle and elaborate study of a bully who rules those around him by the method of taking offence at everything. It is also interesting as the first example of the dramatic construction so typical of Dostoevsky's great novels. The other novel is *The Oppressed and Insulted*, probably the least good of all his books. It is written under the obvious influence of Dickens, and there is plenty of Dickens's sentimentality in it, but none of his humour.

In 1861 Dostoevsky, together with his brother Michael, started a monthly magazine *The Times* (*Vremya*). Its programme was a sort of democratic Slavophilism, akin to that of Grigoriev, who became one of its principal contributors. The magazine met with considerable success, but in 1863 it was suppressed by the Censorship, owing, it soon turned out, to a misunderstanding. The magazine was resumed in 1864 under a new name (*The Epoch*); but the suppression had involved the Dostoevskys in difficulties, and the *Epoch* could not attain the sale of its pre-

decessor. Michael Dostoevsky died and by the beginning of 1865 it was realized that the journal was a complete failure. Dostoevsky entered on a period of pecuniary difficulties, oppressed by debts and the necessity of helping his brother's family. These difficulties were increased by his gambling away all he had in Wiesbaden. For several years Dostoevsky was under the constant stress of these difficulties. For a time he even lived abroad for fear of his Russian creditors. In 1866 he married his secretary and this proved his salvation. His wife turned out to be a very efficient housekeeper, and by 1871 with the aid of his literary earnings he was extricated from his debts. The period of these difficulties was also the period of his greatest literary activity. *Memoirs from Underground* was published in 1864, *Crime and Punishment* in 1866, *The Idiot* in 1869, and *The Possessed* in 1871. Some of these novels, especially *The Idiot*, were written under the immediate stress of need; they came out as serials in the big magazines—the first chapters often appearing before the following chapters were written.

A great inner change had come over Dostoevsky. *The Memoirs from Underground* is the starting-point of that Dostoevsky whom we know, the intrepid investigator of the innermost recesses and most hidden lurking-places of the human soul. He must have gone through a tragic crisis before he wrote this, and the great novels that followed it. But we have no biographical knowledge on this point. It has evidently no connexion with his death sentence and imprisonment, or with his later money difficulties. Its origin must have been internal. But it may have been connected in some way with his epilepsy.

These novels of Dostoevsky attracted considerable attention, but aroused but little admiration. The time was one of fierce party strife. Dostoevsky belonged to no party, but the Radicals considered him a Reactionary and judged him accordingly. The judgements of the critics and reviewers of the time are often

ludicrously inadequate. *Crime and Punishment* was condemned by a Radical critic on the ground that it might favour the opinion that all students were murderers and thieves like Raskolnikov. *The Possessed*, with its violent satire of the Nihilists, aroused a veritable storm of indignation. In 1873 Dostoevsky became editor of the *Citizen*, a Conservative paper, thus identifying himself more closely with the Right. He began publishing weekly his *Diary of a Writer*, and his influence as a journalist began to grow.

In this *Diary* he weekly expounded his teaching in a rather turgid and inelegant prose which lacks the all-pervading creative breath of his novels. His doctrine was, as before, a democratic Slavophilism, a profound belief that the Russian People (with a big P, and mainly meaning the peasants) was a *narod-bogonosets*—'a God-bearing People'. His democracy was ecstatically Christian and anti-revolutionary, and one of his tenets was the necessity of annexing Constantinople. But Dostoevsky was no vulgar Panslavist or Imperialist. Constantinople was to him the symbol of Russia's universal Christian mission, which was to reconcile in one supreme harmony all the nations of the world. Dostoevsky's greatest triumph during his lifetime, and at the same time the fullest and most brilliant assertion of his national doctrine, was the Address he delivered in 1880 on the unveiling of the Pushkin memorial in Moscow. Pushkin, said Dostoevsky, was Russia's all-in-all (*nashe vse*), for the very reason that he was a cosmopolitan, or, as Dostoevsky put it, an All-man (*vse-chelovek*). This Pan-Humanity is the national characteristic of Russia, and Russia's mission is to effect the final synthesis of all mankind.

In the same year was published what is probably his greatest work, *The Brothers Karamazov*, though it produced at first a less powerful effect than the Pushkin address. In the next year, 30 January 1881, he died. His funeral was a striking manifestation

of his wide popularity. The number of mourners was unprecedented. But it was the author of *The House of Death*, the great humanitarian, and the political martyr of 1849 who was being buried. The general attitude of the critics towards Dostoevsky at the moment of his death may be well typified in the poet Sluchevsky's appreciation of him: 'He may or may not have been a great imaginative writer, but there can be no doubt that he was a great Christian and a great Humanitarian.' To-day most of us would rather reverse the judgement.

It took some time for Dostoevsky to come to his own. The best critical appreciation of his work before his death was Mikhaylovsky's essay, *A Cruel Talent*. But though brilliantly penetrating, it is invective rather than criticism. The turn of the tide is marked by the date 1888, when appeared Andreevsky's article on *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Rozanov's book on *The Legend of the Great Inquisitor*. In both of them Dostoevsky was implicitly recognized as a towering genius. Since then his position has become very high and his influence ubiquitous. All the great essayists of about 1900 were mainly commentators of Dostoevsky. His fame has equalled and surpassed Tolstoy's both at home and abroad. And though there have been unhealthy exaggerations in the Dostoevsky mania, his place as one of the two greatest (most of us would now say the second greatest) Russian writers of the second half of the nineteenth century is sufficiently safe.

Although his novels are much more read than his non-imaginative writings, he is usually regarded as a writer who is interesting mainly for his ideas, not for his artistic achievement. Mr. Middleton Murry in his book, which is the most notable English contribution to the study of Dostoevsky, simply refuses to discuss him as a novelist and discusses him only as a generator and handler of ideas. The sentiment of every true Dostoevskian is that there are many good novelists, but only one Dostoevsky. There is a good deal of exaggeration in this attitude. A novel is a novel

for all that, and must be treated as such. But there is also a justification for the non-novelist view—for Dostoevsky's novels are indeed romances, or rather tragedies, of ideas. It has been well said of him, that 'he felt ideas', as we feel frost or heat, hunger or thirst; they were to him potent realities which pull the strings of all human actions. Ideas are the real heroes of his novels; but his ideas are so strongly individualized, so vividly tangible, and so organically complex, that they cease to be mere abstractions and become living beings. They are widely remote from the ideas of Plato: they are dynamic ideas, what the French call—*idées forces*. Very few men before or after Dostoevsky had the same dynamic sensitiveness to ideas: St. Paul, St. Augustine, Pascal, Nietzsche—these are the spiritual kin of Dostoevsky. The ideas among which he moved, or rather by which he was obsessed, are the essential ideas of God and of Good and Evil, and the crucial question to him was, How is it possible to reconcile individual suffering and individual evil with the supreme goodness and perfection of God? How can this suffering and that evil be dissolved into eternal harmony? How can universal harmony make up for the undeserved suffering of a tortured child, which *has been*, and whatever may happen, cannot cease to have been? In short, the crucial questions of Theodicea of how to 'justify the ways of God to man', the stumbling-block, which can never be removed, of all religious philosophy. Ostensibly Dostoevsky was on the side of God, but his religion was entirely irrational and based entirely on a passionate ecstatic devotion to the person of Christ. 'If Christ is not all truth', he writes when yet in Siberia, 'I prefer to be with Christ against truth, than with truth against Christ.' On the logical plane he could never overcome the antinomies of moral reasoning. All his preaching is Christian; but he was only too well aware of what the other side has to say, and in the arguments of the Man from Underground, of Kirilov, and especially of Ivan Karamazov, there is more than can be answered

from the point of view of Dostoevsky's Christianity. What makes the position of all these Dostoevskian Devil's advocates so strong is that they impeach the Divine order from the point of view of the highest morality. On the surface of things, to the superficial reader and thinker, as to the well-intentioned man in self-made blinkers, Dostoevsky is the greatest of Christian teachers, the prophet of a great Christian revival. But whether this is so, and whether Dostoevsky's innermost essence was Christian, is a very doubtful point. There were terrible abysses of evil in the soul of the man who wrote *The Underground* and created Stavrogin. These abysses open at his feet in the moments of his highest creative tension. And there are indications that he had a greater personal experience of evil than is usually believed. Even in his saints, in Prince Myshkin and in Alesha Karamazov, there are abysses and flashes of a terrible understanding and sympathy with evil. The 'prophetic' interpretation of Dostoevsky is the most current. But there are people who see deeper. The first of these was Mikhaylovsky, who used his insight mainly as a weapon against a reactionary author. But the greatest of modern Dostoevskians, Leo Shestov, is also one of the Devil's advocates.

Whatever may be the importance and vitality of Dostoevsky's ideas, he was first of all a novelist. His heroes are not impersonations or abstractions of ideas; they are living human beings agitated by conflicting forces. They are living beings—so much is certain. But are they human beings? At any rate they do not belong to the humanity we belong to. They belong to a world created by Dostoevsky himself, as Gogol and Dickens created theirs. To believe that Dostoevsky's novels are a faithful mirror held up to any section (be it ever so particular) of the Russian *intelligentsia* reveals either a lack of information or a hopeless absence of any sense of reality. His novels are essentially tragedy, and tragedy works in conventions and exaggerations. It would be as reasonable to believe that Elizabethan society consisted of

Tamburlanes and Vittoria Corombonas, or Athenian society of Medeas and Clytemnestras, as to imagine the Russian *intelligentsia* of the age of Alexander II as so many Stavrogins and Verkhovenskys. Dostoevsky used certain conventions of Realism for his tragedies, and used them with consummate skill (his colloquial Russian for instance is a masterpiece of vivid characterization), but he used them to give flesh and blood to utterly unrealistic conceptions. This does not mean that these conceptions are utterly unreal, unreal in the sense of everyday reality; they possess a reality of their own, for they are symbolic. Dostoevsky's people have consequently an enormous convincingness—you are driven to believe in them in defiance of all common sense, and they are as real in the artistic sense as the scrupulously true characters of Tolstoy: even more so, for their vitality is more than human, they are giants too big to walk this earth. The portrait gallery of Dostoevsky must be familiar to every one. Its heroes and Titans are easily classified according to the meaning of the myths they embody. There are the rebels against the moral order of the universe: the passive questioner Ivan Karamazov, the 'pure' super-man Kirilov, the moral adventurer Raskolnikov; then the pure agents of Evil, the disciples of the great Logician the Devil—Smerdyakov and Verkhovensky; tools of lust like the old Karamazov and Svidrigaylov; holy youths inspired with pan-human sympathy, Alesha Karamazov and Prince Myshkin, whose very breath is charity and holiness—and yet they have such strange inner revelations of evil; tormented victims of passion like Rogozhin and Dmitri Karamazov; and, most terrible of all his men, the bored Stavrogin with his purely intellectual curiosity in lust and evil and his complete inner vacuum. And those wonderful women, the most wonderful women of all tragical poetry in whom the pure tragic essence of Dostoevsky is most concentrated, the demoniac, proud and wretched Nastasia Filipovna, and Grushenka. Truly a wonderful

universe with more pure creation in it than any other world, except the one we live in.

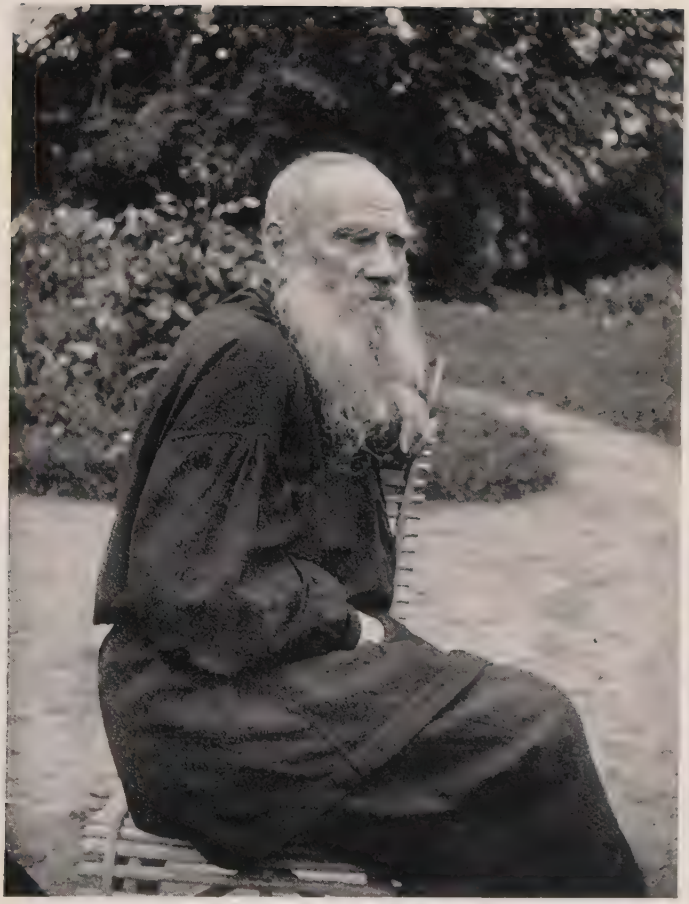
Unlike most of his contemporaries Dostoevsky did not neglect plot, and though in most of his novels it is confused and intricate, in *Crime and Punishment* he achieved a masterpiece of construction. The narrative or rather dramatic interest of his novels never flags. His most potent method in achieving this constant tension of interest is his mastery in dialogue. Dostoevsky's novels contain more dialogue than anything else; in fact all the rest is no more important than stage directions are in a play. It has been found very easy to turn his novels into plays without adding a single word. The dialogue is marvellously individualized. In the Russian original you recognize every character by the peculiar intonations and rhythm of his speech as easily as you recognize the voice of a friend. It is difficult to lay one's hand on the processes by which the novelist arrives at the effect. The dialogue is kept up at a high pitch of emotional tension which communicates itself to the reader, making it impossible for him to lay down the book before he has finished it. To read a novel of Dostoevsky's is something of an adventure; to embark on it is to become his slave for the time it takes one to master his 300,000 words. Dostoevsky's novels are very long, but hardly too long, so charged is all the dialogue with emotional and psychological significance. The contrast is strong between the dialogue and the narrative part: his narrative prose, like his journalism, is slovenly, unkempt journalese. His dialogue is a marvel of effectiveness. This makes those of his works which are written in *monologue*, the hero all the time speaking in the first person, his most uniformly perfect work. Such are some minor sketches inserted in the *Diary of a Writer*; such most of all are the *Memoirs from Underground*, which are perhaps the quintessence of his genius. Here the tension of interest is reached exclusively by psychological means, without the help of narrative

interest. It is the triumph of his analytical power and his greatest claim to the title of a cruel genius.

To contrast Tolstoy with Dostoevsky has been a favourite subject on which many writers have enlarged, and no one better than Merezkhovsky in his well-known and very good book on these two great authors.

Their lives form a striking contrast. Unlike the plebeian Dostoevsky, Count Tolstoy was born of one of the best families in the country, and lived a long life of affluence and success, which, but for his inner struggles, would have also been a life of almost cloudless happiness. He was blessed with a wife of rare virtue and devotion, who bore him numerous children. He augmented his fortune both by efficient farming and by success in literature, and attained a world-wide celebrity which has been equalled in modern times only by great conquerors or successful leaders of revolutions. Napoleon, Garibaldi, and Lenin are the only men within the last hundred and odd years whose fame during their lifetime was equal to or greater than that of Tolstoy.

Count Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy was born at Yasnaya Polyana (gov. of Tula), on 28 August 1828. Nicholas Rostov (=Tolstoy) and Marie Bolkonsky (=Volkonsky) of *War and Peace* are roughly his father and mother. His education was strictly aristocratic, and he did not come in touch with the intellectuals before he went to the University. There and in subsequent life he never mixed with them. In all his books the 'peasant and peer' standpoint is consistently maintained. The middle classes are absent from them. Of all the great writers of his generation he was, with the exception of Fet, the least a man-of-letters: he was just a gentleman. His idiosyncracies prevented him from being a man of the world; but he was most himself when, after his marriage, he spent eighteen years on his estates, farming, rearing cattle, and providing for the future welfare of



TOLSTOY

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his numerous children, seeing but a few relations and friends of his own class, much interested in his peasants, and writing long epics about noble families. He was a whimsical and somewhat uncouth country gentleman, but for all that a country gentleman to his finger-tips. The interests of the literary profession did not exist for him, and he had no friends in the literary world (his quarrel with Turgenev is notorious) except Fet, who was primarily a country neighbour, and Strakhov, who had a turn of thought in tune with Tolstoy's, and was for a long time the only critic to do anything like justice to his novels. When after his 'conversion' Tolstoy cast aside all his earthly interests, he still did not become a littérateur or a journalist—he became a prophet, something much more like Buddha than like Voltaire or Rousseau. The patriarchal and intensely aristocratic figure of Tolstoy is in violent contrast to the general plebeian groundwork of Russian literary life from Belinsky and Turgenev to our own times. It is one of the principal elements of his unique position, and must not be lost sight of. It developed in him that proud individualism which is so curiously inconsistent with his anti-individual yearnings. It was Nature, of course, that made him great; but the full development of his gigantic nature was favoured by his wealth and high social standing. The greatness of Tolstoy, like the greatness of Job, is primarily a moral greatness; but this moral greatness found favourable conditions for its development in the social and economic independence of those two rich men. In the greatness of Tolstoy, as in that of Job, there is an element which is identical with the greatness of a patriarch like Laban or like Aksakov's Stepan Mikhaylovich Bagrov.

But to return to the facts of Tolstoy's life. In 1848 he went down from Kazan University without taking a degree, and intended to settle at his now famous estate of Yasnaya Polyana, and to engage in farming. But this at the time proved a failure, and after a period of rather wild life at Moscow he joined the

army as an ensign and went to the Caucasus, where a long-drawn-out war was being waged against the mountaineers. Before he had been long in the army he completed his first story *Childhood*, and sent it to Nekrasov, the editor of the most influential magazine of the day. Nekrasov received it with enthusiasm, and it was immediately printed over the signature L. T. (1852). Tolstoy had early begun writing diaries and the like, in which he had exercised and refined his innate genius for psychological analysis and the observation of minute facts of the inner life. He was, and always remained, an ardent admirer of Rousseau. In *Childhood* this kinship with Rousseau is very apparent. Equally apparent is a highly developed power of analysis. The story is a masterpiece which remained unsurpassed by the author for many years. In *Childhood* (and in its sequel *Boyhood*, but to a much lesser extent in *Youth*) he displayed already that wonderful power of creating the illusion of absolute truth, of absolute fidelity to life, which marks him off from all, even the greatest. It gives an impression of transcending art, of not only representing, but *being* life. It is easy to understand that it created a sensation and gave the impression that a new power was entering literature, but this sensation was at first limited to the inner circles of literature. Even after *War and Peace* Tolstoy's fame was largely confined to those inner circles and to the upper classes of whose life he had drawn such an attractive picture. It did not become universal till later. But *Childhood* was not followed up by masterpieces of superior or even equal quality. The next years were a period of transition. In the stories written between 1852 to 1862 he is not the same supreme master of psychological realism. For he was *learning*, and, partly under the influence of Stendhal, deepening and perfecting his methods of analysis. Personal experience had also given an edge to his analytical powers, for there are no more powerful revealers of natural man than war and its following—discomfort and danger. Fear is a great 'de-

veloper'. It is precisely in the treatment of fear that Tolstoy achieves his first triumphs in analysis. As a consequence the works of this period, of which the *Sebastopol* sketches may be taken as typical, are somewhat misshapen : they are exercises in analysis rather than works of art. These exercises enhanced his power of expression, but they had to be mellowed before it attained to its full maturity.

In these early stories Tolstoy is already a preacher. He preaches a gospel of return to nature and of trust in the 'natural man', a developed form of the teachings of Rousseau. In Tolstoy's case it had been largely favoured by intercourse with 'primitive' types of Cossacks and mountaineers in the Caucasus.

In a series of stories written after 1855 Tolstoy is still a preacher. Owing to his immaturity these stories with a purpose are often even more openly didactic than those he wrote after his conversion. Such, for instance, are *Lucerne* and *Three Deaths*. This was only a transient stage. He was working hard and striving after more perfect forms of expression. The stories that mark the end of this period are again works of conscious and mature art. In *The Cossacks* (1853–1861) he finds an adequate expression for his ideal of the natural man in the primitive Cossacks of the Terek, especially in the heathen and pantheist huntsman Uncle Yeroshka. In *Kholstomer, the History of a Horse* (1861), he goes one better and applies his perfected methods of analysis to the feelings of a dumb animal. *Kholstomer* thus marks the farthest limit, both in his endeavour to reach unadulterated 'nature' and in the audacious expansion of his analytical methods over new and untrodden fields.

After serving for two years on the Caucasian front Tolstoy volunteered, in 1854, to join the garrison of Sebastopol, and from there sent his three famous sketches which were published before the siege had ended, and so had all the interest of actuality. They produced a profound impression by their daring analysis

and consciously unromantic representation of the great romantic stock-subject—war. After the war Tolstoy came to St. Petersburg. He was received as an equal by the greatest writers of the day, but though by no means insensitive to popularity, he disliked the atmosphere of literary St. Petersburg. He left the army, travelled abroad, and settled in Yasnaya Polyana. There he took to the education of village children, and startled and scandalized his liberal and progressive contemporaries by declaring that the peasants had nothing to learn from 'us', but on the contrary it was 'we' who had to learn from the village children. In 1861 he fell in love with Sophie Bers. At first he was sure that being old (34) and ugly he had no chance of being loved by her, and under this impression wrote *Family Happiness*, the least remarkable of all his imaginative works. But in 1862 he married her and settled down to the quiet and prosperous family life of a rich country gentleman. This life continued till the beginning of his religious crisis. It saw the making of his greatest works *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*—his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Although for Russians the work of Pushkin is a more essential and indispensable fact of national civilization, it is probable that to the world at large these two novels are Russia's most important contribution to literature. They have been pronounced to be the greatest novels in the world, and whether this be true or not, they certainly occupy an unique place among the world's novels. That which distinguishes them from the rest is not a question of degree or quantity, but a question of presence and absence. If this peculiar Tolstoyan quality be taken as a standard of excellence, the other novelists are simply equal in their inferiority; they have not a grain of it. It is the peculiar power of creating men and women who have a convincing roundness and a vividness which makes us classify them with real men and women. In Tolstoy's characters the absolutely universal is combined with absolutely unique features in such a way that they are at once

recognized not as types, nor as creations of an imagination, but as individuals, with no more symbolism in them than is inherent in every one of us. This effect is, of course, based on analysis, which Tolstoy learned from his French masters, and perhaps from Lermontov; but in Stendhal and Lermontov the elements of personality remain distinct and separate, and analysis does not result in synthesis. It is significant that the only two great writers who have in any degree the same quality were also Frenchmen—the Duke of Saint Simon and Marcel Proust. But the genius of Saint Simon was unconscious and is not accompanied by the light of analysis, for analysis was still to be discovered. As for Marcel Proust, though he gives his people absolute reality and personality, he does not give to his figures that solidity which Tolstoy gives to his. Proust's figures are animated nebulae; Tolstoy's have the toughness of human beings.

It is superfluous to give any detailed account of these two novels, for every one who has heard of the existence of such a thing as Russian literature is presumed to have read them. As works of art, apart from that power which is peculiar to Tolstoy, they may be easily found wanting. But it is doubtful whether a more condensed and crisp narrative would not have been out of place. The spacious, loose, easy form of a family chronicle dealing at once with several families and several plots, that have little or nothing in common, is decidedly the best form for the manifestation of his peculiar genius, the best way of giving to the absolutely real characters an absolutely real frame to move in. This form of the two novels, which are 'slices of life' rather than connected narratives, must be justified as necessary for that supreme effect of life itself which they produce upon us. The effect of absolute realism is enhanced by the fact that Tolstoy chose and limited himself to the class he knew so well and to which he belonged—the uppermost stratum of the Russian nobility. The life of the Russian upper classes between 1805–1820 and

about 1875 is not represented—it is re-created: it seems to live for ever not by the medium of art, but by some mysterious process of vital continuity. It has been pointed out that *War and Peace* is historically insufficient. The Napoleonic generation were not capable of reducing to articulate speech the exceedingly elusive feelings Tolstoy deals in. Natasha is an anachronism. It may be so, and we may agree that it is not a picture of the time as it was, but of the time as it would have been if peopled by men and women of a later mentality. This is a venial offence, if an offence at all. A more serious offence is the constant intrusion of the rationalizing and moralizing Count Tolstoy into this universe of his creation. In *Anna Karenina* this didactic element is so finely concealed that it does not strike the reader until he has grasped the whole moral hinted at in the motto. But it permeates the texture of the novel more thoroughly than in *War and Peace*. *Anna Karenina* is from this point of view a cunningly written novel with a purpose. In *War and Peace* the main texture is quite free from this disingenuous preoccupation. This makes the first two parts of the novel the most agreeable reading in the whole of Tolstoy. But it contains a certain proportion, which grows as the novel advances, of purely rationalizing chapters written to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of personality and the smallness of great men. Some of these chapters may be simply left out. But others—all those dealing with Napoleon, Kutuzov, and the symbolic peasant Platon Karataev who is the incarnation of the unconscious wisdom of the masses—are closely woven into the texture of the story, and cannot be taken away from it without destroying the architecture of the whole.

Tolstoy's philosophy at this time, best expressed in *War and Peace*, and somewhat less distinctly in *Anna Karenina*, is a philosophy of complete submission to life and to the subconscious wisdom of the race. It subordinates reason to the irrational. But Tolstoy, greatest of rationalists, who had carried the light of

analysis into the deepest recesses of the animal spirit, could not remain satisfied with such an irrational solution. He felt the necessity of finding a rational explanation of life. The horror of inevitable death must be rationally justified. At the time of the completion of *Anna Karenina* the initial energy of his family happiness was spent, and the approaching age of fifty made the shadow of death an ever more menacing reality. In the years that followed the completion of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy underwent a crisis which, after a period of almost hopeless despair, led him to adopt a philosophy which has come to be known as Tolstoyism, and the propaganda of which filled the last thirty years of his life.

It is not my task here to describe the genesis or the essence of Tolstoyism. Its essential characteristics are familiar to every educated and semi-educated European, American, and Asiatic.[1] It identified itself with Christianity, but of all the teaching of Christ it took ' Thou shalt not oppose evil with violence ' as the central point. It was, in fact, a purely negative doctrine, more akin to Buddhism than to Christianity. It involved, among other things, the negation of all modern civilization as tending to increase the inequality of men. It is profoundly rationalistic. It rejects for purely rationalistic motives the doctrine of future life and all the sacramental teaching of the Church. But, like all rationalism, it was doomed to leave an unexplained residue. Tolstoy was aware of this residue, but he did his utmost to keep his eyes away from it. His rationalism went ' thus far and no farther '. Under its surface there remained the irrational man. He had been well bridled, and there is scarcely a trace of him in most of Tolstoy's writings after 1880. But he is unmistakably present in the fragment called *Memoirs of a Madman*, and we catch more than one glimpse of him in the wonderful reminiscences of Gorky. Tolstoy's teaching, for reasons which it would be out of place to

[1] The best English book on the ideas of Tolstoy is *Tolstoy*, by Janko Lavrin (Collins).

discuss here, attained enormous popularity, and in a few years he became the best known writer in the world, and Yasnaya Polyana the Mecca of a new cult. Tolstoy's obvious greatness was so great that the Russian Government, who had little to like in his activities, left him unmolested, and never so much as touched a hair of his head.[1] It contented itself with pursuing his less illustrious followers.

After his conversion his literary activity did not cease, nor did it on the whole lose in quality; but it assumed a very different character, becoming a consistent and rigidly thought out propaganda of his new doctrines. The new period of Tolstoy's literary work opens with the *Confession*, written in 1879 and published in 1882. It is certainly one of the most remarkable books ever written. But it displays qualities of a radically different kind from those we find in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. It is a perfectly tempered weapon meant to fight with, not a disinterested reproduction of life. It is written with passion and a power that has no equal, and with a lucidity and distinctness of outline which we hardly expect from the author of *War and Peace*. Its sincerity is deeply convincing, though it is quite obvious that Tolstoy's sincerity is not what we call by that name in our daily life. It is a fully self-conscious and disciplined sincerity, a sincerity of 'thus far and no farther'. Tolstoy's conscious art and artistic mastery is nowhere more intense and perfect than in his *Confession*. The work which announces his apostacy from art is his most perfect artistic creation. For force of expression there is nothing equal to the first, negative part of the *Confession*, containing the story of the crisis that led to his 'conversion'. Its nearest relation in

[1] The excommunication of Tolstoy by the Holy Synod in 1902 was a perfectly justifiable and abundantly provoked act. It did not, as is often imagined, lay a curse on him; but merely registered the fact that he had separated himself from the Church, a fact he had explicitly recognized more than once.

literature is Ecclesiastes, but I venture to think that the Russian book is even superior to the Jewish. If the end—the positive part, the conversion itself—may come to some readers as a sort of anti-climax, this is due to the lesser value of the ideas expressed, not to the quality of the literary art, which is sustained to the end.

In his other didactic writings, written after 1882, Tolstoy shows the same qualities of lucidity, clarity, consistency, powerful logic, excellently-tempered irony. But none of them contain so much passion and energy. The most remarkable of these writings is *What is Art?* It is well known to the English reader, and, in spite of its narrow perversity, contains more wise and witty things on Art than any other book on the subject. What is most admirable in all Tolstoy's didactic and moral tracts is his language, which is very largely a creation of his own. It is entirely free from all bookish and 'intellectual' influence. It is exclusively based on the spoken language of the society he belonged to—and at the same time it is admirably adapted for the treatment of abstract and philosophical questions. No writer has written on such subjects in a more lucid, simple, and universal way. His phrase is long and complex, but mathematically exact in its structure. In fact Tolstoy is the writer who has best succeeded in making the Russian language a vehicle of abstract thought. But his abstractness always tends towards the concrete and the visual, and one of his favourite and happiest methods is the parable, which he uses with supreme skill, and nowhere with more effect than in the well-known passages of the *Confession*, where he concentrates round parables all the principal emotional effects of his sermon.

After his conversion Tolstoy condemned all his previous imaginative writings. But he did not condemn himself to producing no more. He wrote a quantity of plays (which are discussed in the following chapter) and stories. These stories do not possess the charm of *War and Peace*; only a few passages from

Resurrection (1899, the youth of Katyusha Maslova) and *Hajji Murat* (written in 1903, published 1911) have the particular flavour his readers had grown accustomed to. But as his work lost the free unfettered charm of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, it acquired other qualities which are also of a high artistic order, qualities of economy, construction, and concentration. The didactic and philosophical stories of this period are on the whole superior to the 'tendentious' stories of his youth, like *Lucerne* or *Three Deaths*. These stories are of two kinds—stories written for the educated reader and stories intended for the 'people'. In the former Tolstoy continues his method of detailed description and minute analysis. But he gives it a new edge, and concentrates his forces more decidedly towards a distinct end. The first of these is *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1882), a counterpart to *Confession*, a piece of extraordinarily penetrating analysis and, unlike his earlier works, of powerful synthesis, constructed, like *Confession*, with the supreme art which may be qualified as 'musical' or 'lyrical'. It was followed by *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1888), *Master and Man* (1895), *Resurrection* (1899), *Hajji Murat*, *The Devil*, and *Father Sergius*. Of these, *Hajji Murat* alone is a disinterested story of Caucasian romance. The others are all written with a purpose. *Resurrection*, which was meant to be the great imaginative synthesis of Tolstoyism, is very imperfect. Nowhere is the essential aridity of the doctrine more obvious. It contains numerous passages comparable to his great novels, but as a whole it is a failure. The other stories are problem stories, concentrated round distinct philosophical problems—the meaning of mortal life (*Ivan Ilyich*), moral duty (*Master and Man*), the desires of the flesh (*Kreutzer Sonata*, *The Devil*, *Father Sergius*). They are unequal in merit. The first two are masterpieces, and *Ivan Ilyich* especially is a work of infinite and universal significance—*The Confession* translated from the language of Ecclesiastes into that of *Anna Karenina*.

The stories written for the people reject all the paraphernalia of the realistic novel—descriptive detail and emotional analysis. They acquire a classical neatness of outline, a reticence and a conciseness which Tolstoy towards the end of his life valued above all artistic qualities. This change of artistic standards explains his later dislike for *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. He chose for his model the stories of the book of Genesis; he held the story of Joseph to be the best thing in all narrative literature. His stories for the 'people' are admirable for these qualities, which, again, could hardly be suspected in the Tolstoy one knew before 1880. Many of these stories are universally familiar. They are essentially parables. Most of them are very short and all of them are packed with narrative interest. Among the longer and more elaborate ones *The False Coupon* is as delightful a piece of narrative as there is in Russian literature. So after all, in his last period Tolstoy did not bury his talent—he only directed it towards new ways. From a literary point of view his last period is a period of classical style, of selection, self-limitation, and outline, as opposed to the preceding period of naturalism, of comprehensive inclusion, of expansion, and atmosphere.[1]

Meanwhile Tolstoy continued living in Yasnaya, at his house in Moscow, or in the Crimea, surrounded by the devoted attention of his wife and family and the admiring importunity of pilgrims from all parts of the world. A group of fervent Tolstoyans, chief among whom was the ex-Horse-Guardsman V. G. Chertkov, began to play an ever-increasing part in his life. The contradiction between his ascetic doctrine and the comfortable life at Yasnaya gradually came to weigh heavily on Tolstoy. He had renounced all his possessions, but they had passed to his wife who had no

[1] A brilliant analysis of Tolstoy's narrative style with a comparison between his earlier and late style is to be found in *Analysis, Style and Atmosphere in the Novels of Tolstoy* by Constantine Leontiev (no English translation), which is the masterpiece of Russian critical literature (see p. 81).

wish to leave her numerous children unprovided for. Tolstoy's house gradually became the field of a permanent war between Countess Tolstoy and Chertkov. Life at Yasnaya became a hell. Tolstoy more and more began to feel the incongruity of his position at home ; and finally decided to leave it. At the end of October 1910 he left his house in the company of his doctor and his daughter Alexandra, the only one of his children who had adopted his doctrines. He first went to see his sister who was a nun at a convent near Optina, then he travelled farther without any destination. The state of his health forced him to stop at Astapovo Junction (gov. of Ryazan) ; there in the station-master's house he died on 9 November 1910. He was buried at Yasnaya. There was an enormous attendance at the burial, but over his grave no Christian prayers were said.

4

The Drama (1850–1890)

The Russian drama cuts a comparatively poor figure by the side of its neighbour arts. The realistic drama is overshadowed by the novel, the historical drama by the opera. Then again the Russian playwright has been largely eclipsed by the actor, and since 1900 by the producer. The Russian theatre is brilliant and interesting, but dramatic literature plays a secondary part both in theatrical and in literary history.

The main characteristic of Russian drama, as of the Russian novel, is its attention to character and its neglect of plot. It is even more undramatic than the Russian novel is un-narrative. This undramatic quality reaches its climax in the ripest and most original fruit of the Russian drama—the plays of Chekhov.

But the same neglect of plot becomes discernible much earlier—in the comedies of Fonvizin and Griboyedov, and is unmistakable in the work of Ostrovsky, the greatest Russian writer to devote himself exclusively to the drama. He was the exact contemporary of the great novelists and all that has been said of the general character of their work may be applied to his plays. The greater part of these is neither tragedy nor comedy, but belongs to the hybrid variety called drama *tout court*.

Alexander Nikolaevich Ostrovsky was born in Moscow in 1823, the son of an attorney (if English terms are applicable to the very un-English forms of Russian pre-Reform law courts), whose practice was among the rich but uneducated merchants of the city. This was the class Ostrovsky chose for the subject of his plays. His first play appeared in 1850 and produced a sensation. Ostrovsky was hailed as the dramatist of the Natural School. From that date until his death in 1886 he almost monopolized the stage. A whole school of Russian actors grew up on his plays, a school which till quite recently dominated the State theatres of both capitals. Ostrovsky's plays may be described as dramatized short stories. He was fully aware of the exigences of the stage, but what the Russian stage demands is good parts for individual actors, 'grateful' parts as the Russian theatrical phrase has it. To arouse the dramatic suspense of the audience is a secondary thing. Ostrovsky's chief theme is not character, it is 'byt'—the peculiar manners and idiosyncracies of some particular milieu. This milieu in most of his plays is the merchant class. Ostrovsky's characters are not so much individuals as types. One of the most memorable which he repeats in an infinite but never tiring and by no means monotonous variety, is the 'samodur'—the domestic tyrant. Ostrovsky is infinitely resourceful in drawing various shades of this parental despotism. Especially striking is his gallery of female tyrants. No one has excelled him in representing the callousness and selfishness of old women. Ostrovsky's merchants

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are very unlike the educated gentry of his fellow-realists. They are more primitive, more barbarous, less refined; but also saner, stronger of will and more of a piece. Ostrovsky was not sure whether to like or to hate them. He oscillated between an admiration for their strong characters, their strong patriarchal principles, and a repulsion for their savage crudeness. He could idealize the 'head of the house' into a patriarch, or vilify him into a vulgar bully. This of course only adds to the variety and 'objectivity' of his types. There is nothing more sordid than the merchants of his first 'comedy', *The Bankrupt*, and nothing more biblically noble than the merchant of *Know your place*. This last play is one of Ostrovsky's very few plays that have a definite, 'classically' constructed plot. But his masterpiece, and one of the masterpieces of Russian literature, is the *Thunderstorm* (1860), which is distinctly of the undramatic type. It is so pregnant with the poetical 'atmosphere' of a Russian country town on the Volga; there is so much passionate poetry in the heroine Katerina that it can be placed on a level with the very best of Turgenev's stories, and its parts are so 'grateful' that it is the favourite play of the Russian repertoire, both with the public and with the actors.

Though Ostrovsky was the one great writer who was a dramatist only, many of his contemporaries wrote plays between times. Turgenev wrote many in his early years, before the success of *A Sportsman's Sketches* finally directed him to fiction. His plays are very enjoyable and competent, but they are for the most part dramatized short stories. The most interesting is the psychological comedy *A Month in the Country*, which has a foretaste of Chekhov.

A much truer dramatist was Pisemsky, as in his novels he was a truer story-teller. His drama *A Bitter Fate* is, from the dramatic point of view, one of the best Russian plays. It is the only realistic drama in Russian that deserves the name of tragedy. It is con-

OSTROVSKY

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structed with classical perfection. The plot turns on the relations between a serf who has made money and his master who has become the lover of the peasant's wife. The peasant is the type of the strong and tyrannical 'head of the house'; the gentleman is the kindly type of man with no will, familiar to us from so many of Turgenev's stories. The serf is a tyrant to his wife, who really loves the master, and a rebel to the squire. The situation is eminently dramatic and is developed with much dramatic ability.

Another writer who stands out as a dramatist, not a mere novelist in dialogue, is Sukhovo-Kobylin (1817–1902). He wrote plays which are violent satires against officialdom, and excellent comedies of intrigue. The best known is *Krechinsky's Marriage*. It was never appreciated by the critics, but had an immense success with the public. The others were too violent in their satire to be passed by the stage censorship. Such is *The Death of Tarelkin*, a broad and crude satire, truly Aristophanic, and second to nothing of its kind, short of Gogol's *Revizor*. But there is in it a fierceness of which Gogol was quite incapable.

Dostoevsky, whose genius was so eminently dramatic, wrote no dramas, but many of his novels have been dramatized and formed an important item in the repertory of the twentieth-century Russian stage. Tolstoy, on the other hand, who had no dramatic proclivity, wrote several plays in his later years. The *Power of Darkness*, though a powerful and impressively hopeless picture of Russian peasant life, and, as such, popular both at home and abroad, is hardly a good play. The plot is overloaded with irrelevant details of 'byt'. *The Fruits of Culture* is a decidedly amusing comedy, of the quieter kind; it contains the essence of all that lighter satire of 'society' which is diffused in *Anna Karenina* and elsewhere. *The Living Corpse* is as undramatic as any Russian play. It is a dramatized novel. But there is in it a mellowness and a sympathetic wisdom which makes it, at least

to the present writer, one of the most attractive of all Tolstoy's works. Lastly, I may mention the didactic anti-liquor comedy, *The First Distiller*, which stands out for that lucidity and neatness of outline that is characteristic of all Tolstoy's didactic work. It is as good a morality as has been written since the Middle Ages.

The historical drama in verse (which shared with drama of real life the favour of the public) originated about 1860, when the hitherto unfruitful lead of Pushkin in *Boris Godunov* was taken up almost simultaneously by several writers. This type of drama is mainly interesting as having given so many librettos to the Russian opera. The opera composers did not limit themselves to using ready-made librettos, and the greatest of them, Musorgsky, was also a great dramatist. He wrote his own text for *Khovanschina* and reconstructed and remodelled Pushkin's *Boris* into a 'popular drama' (as he called it) of greater sweep than its original.

Ostrovsky was among the first to try his hand at this genre. His chronicle plays are decidedly poor, but his *Snegurochka* (Snow-maiden)—which Rimsky-Korsakov set to music—is a singularly charming and original production. Ostrovsky utilizes in a very fruitful way the material of the Russian folk-stories and creates a wonderful world of phantasy in which mythological romance is closely intertwined with a quietly-sparkling, very Russian humour.

Of the strictly historical plays Alexey Tolstoy's dramatic Trilogy are the best known. Not that they are really very great plays: they are turgid and lack concision; their local colour is conventional and operatic; their versification is poor, distinctly inferior to the narrative, humorous, and lyrical work of the same poet. But they contain good dramatic situations, and the character of Tsar Fyodor in the play of the same name is one of the most interesting in Russian literature. He is the saintly fool—the same character as Dostoevsky's Idiot, but stripped of all its peculiarly Dostoevskian features and exalted to royal rank.

5

Poets

The Victorian age in England was an eclectic age, an age of compromise. The contemporary period in Russia was, on the whole, of a different character. It was rather an age of extremes, both in politics and in art. The Nihilists, Dostoevsky, Musorgsky, or a reactionary statesman like Pobedonostsev, were not at all 'Victorian' figures. But there was just one province where the Victorian tendency was distinctly apparent, and this was poetry. The Russian poets of the mid-nineteenth century sought for a compromise between the conflicting forces in and about them; between the rights of poetical imagination and the hard facts of science; between 'pure art' and social utilitarianism; between romanticism and realism. With two exceptions—Fet and Nekrasov, who stand out as extremes—the poets of the period are eclectic and 'Victorian'. And of all the prose-writers Turgenev, the most poetical, is also the most 'Victorian'.

There are however important points of differences between Victorian poetry in England and in Russia. The chief of these is that in England the Victorian age was a golden age, if not of genius, at least of poetical culture. The level of poetical craftsmanship was very high during the period that begins with Tennyson and ends with Swinburne. In Russia on the contrary there was a distinct falling off from the high level of the preceding age. A low and constantly sinking level of poetical culture is characteristic of the Russian 'Victorians'. As a rule the later the date of a poet's birth the less chance is there of his having written good verse, and the older he grew the worse he wrote. The most popular and least questioned poet of the time was Apollon Maykov (1821–1897). He satisfied the taste of the average Russian poetry-reader for cheap ideas, tame picturesqueness, and mild realism. Another typical eclectic was Yakov

Petrovich Polonsky (1819–1898), an infinitely more attractive poet, who succumbed to the low poetic culture of the times and to the desire of expressing modern ideas. His best work is charming, at once romantic and homely, a world of sweet music and dimly coloured horizons. He has a simplicity and truth in the expression of sentiment which makes him a worthy heir to Lermontov and Pushkin. But his good work would occupy but a few dozen pages—out of the five volumes of his collected poems.

A more interesting and independent figure was Count Alexey Tolstoy (1817–1875). He was a distant cousin of the great novelist, and a personal friend (he had been a playfellow) of the Emperor, Alexander II. He wrote lyrics, ballads, narrative poems, dramas (which I have mentioned in the preceding chapter), an historical romance, parodies, humorous satires, and even genuine nonsense verse. In these last categories he is absolutely supreme among Russian writers, and his *Dream of Popov* and the works he attributed to the imaginary civil servant Kosma Prutkov, are an inexhaustible mine of pure fun. He had a good ear for the sound of words and some of his historical ballads would well answer to Mr. Chesterton's description of Macaulay's *Armada* as a 'good geographical map gone mad'. But he also wrote in the purest 'Tennysonian' and idealist style. Some of his shorter lyrics are as fresh and pure as drops of rain hanging from a flower;—no one ever spoke better than he did of rain and dew and sunlight and the freshness that comes after a thunderstorm. His paraphrase of the lament used in the Orthodox service for the dead is one of the noblest pieces of religious poetry produced in the nineteenth century.[1] He was not an eclectic in the sense of submitting to any external compromise, but he was a man of the golden mean, of harmony and taste, as he was a moderate liberal in politics.

[1] This and another lyric of his are excellently translated in Mr. Baring's preface to *The Oxford Book of Russian Verse.*

The ' extreme right ' in poetry is occupied by Afanasi Afanasievich Fet (1820–1892, after 1877 he took the name of Shenshin), the champion of ' pure art ' and of the eternal rights of the Poet. He was in private life a selfish and successful business man. He devoted most of his life to raising the revenue of his estates. He was the intimate friend of Leo Tolstoy, who valued his talent very highly, and who, it will be remembered, also devoted a period of his life to the aggrandizement of his rural fortune. There was in Fet a singular contrast between the man and the poet. He consciously cultivated it and advisedly lived a double life. Poetry, he said, was a mountain country, and in its rarefied atmosphere it was impossible to live permanently. It was a sanctuary, not a home. His poetry is purely lyrical, the essence of the lyrical element. In the '60's the Radical critics who attacked all poetry hooted him down, and he disappeared from literature for twenty years, to reappear only for a short time before his death. His early poetry (1840–1860) is what has since come to be called impressionistic. It is nature and love poetry. The most characteristic lyrics are curiously anticipative of Verlaine and the French Symbolists. But Fet was fundamentally sane and his poetry is in the major key. In his nature worship he was not so much a pantheist as a pagan. This early poetry is strikingly original and entitles him to a place among the four or five greatest Russian poets. His later poetry is more severe. It breathes the ' rarefied atmosphere ' he loved to speak of. It is pure poetry, without a single drop of non-poetry in it, and like pure gold is somewhat difficult to handle. It may almost be compared with the ' pure poetry ' of Mallarmé, but a rural, country-gentlemanly, and very Russian Mallarmé.

At the other extreme stands the powerful figure of Nikolay Alekseevich Nekrasov (1821–1877). He was and is the impersonation of civic poetry. He came from a family of provincial gentry, but early left his father's house and started out in life on his own

account in St. Petersburg. He was successful. By 1846 he was the editor and part-proprietor of the *Sovremennik* (*Contemporary*), which he made the most influential Russian periodical, and the rallying-ground of all that was best in literature. After 1856 it became more exclusively Radical, and Nekrasov the head of the Left wing of Russian literature. He was idolized by the radical youth of the sixties and seventies, and detested by the 'aesthetic' school; even Turgenev maintained that 'poetry had never as much as passed a night in Nekrasov's verse'. Only recently has he finally been recognized as a great and unquestioned poet, not because of the civic character and revolutionary spirit of his work, but because of its originality and vigour. Nekrasov's poetry is not of the conventional Victorian type. He studiously avoided prettiness even at the risk of forfeiting beauty. His verse is often an amalgam of rhetoric and vulgarity which makes it dangerously like journalism, for he boldly introduced the crudest prose diction into the sacrosanct precinct of the muse. But he had great power over all the sterner forms of satire—from bitter sarcasm to lyrical invective. A splendid specimen of the latter is the 'elegy' *Home*, so admirably translated into English by Professor Elton.[1] His love-poetry is entirely original, which is free from all idealization and has for its principal subject his quarrels with his mistress. On the other hand his poetry for children is for its homely, familiar humour as unique in its way as Alexey Tolstoy's nonsense verse. The central nerve of Nekrasov's poetry is his adoration of the people. It attains to mythological proportions in the wonderful poem *Frost the Red-nosed*, where the Russian peasant and peasant woman are painted on a truly Homeric scale. He was the only Russian poet to understand and to adopt with success the forms of the Russian popular song. His two masterpieces are developments, on original lines, of popular forms. One of these is *The Pedlars*, a story of peasant life told

[1] *The London Mercury*, March 1922.

NEKRASOV

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in a rapid and exhilarating folk-ballad style. The other is *Who lives happily in Russia*, a vast epic, satirical, humorous and realistic. It gives a broad picture of post-Reform Russia over which the seven peasants wander in quest of the happy Russian. It is a masterpiece of verbal felicity, and a great achievement of realistic poetry.

Nekrasov was immensely popular, but had next to no influence on the development of Russian poetry. His so-called disciples, the 'civic' poets of radicalism, had not nerve enough to adopt his drastic and ungenteel methods. They preferred to wallow in mawkish sentiment expressed in helpless verse. Such is the poetry of Nadson (1862–1887), the idol of the *intelligentsia* of thirty and forty years ago. In the generation that followed that of Nekrasov and Fet the art of poetry reached its low watermark, chiefly owing to the utter decline of craftsmanship. The partisans of Art for Art's sake were as poor as the civic poets. The secret of writing verse was lost, and even if a poet of genius happened to be born in that age he was incapable of expressing himself otherwise than in a stammer. Such was the case of Constantine Sluchevsky (1837–1904), a poet of great possibilities, who seemed capable of creating a truly modern poetry. It would have given expression to a vast and original pluralistic conception of the universe, but he failed because he had no tongue to speak with.

6

Critics and Publicists

It is not my task to outline a history of Russian political and ethical thought. I am merely concerned with literature, and with those writers, whatever may have been their subjects, who produced literary masterpieces. But a few brief indications of the development of ideas must be given as landmarks.

Russian political, social, and ethical thought from about 1840

onwards was dominated by an antagonism between Radicals and Traditionalists. The Russian Radicals rejected all native tradition, and of European tradition accepted only its rationalism and progressiveness. Their religion was Enlightenment and Democracy. This religion passed through many phases. At first it was strongly coloured by German Idealist Philosophy and French Idealist Socialism. Towards 1860 it became agnostic, it went in for natural science and swore by Darwin and the German materialists. About 1870 it assumed its most typical Russian form in the doctrine of the Populists (Narodniki).[1] Their occidentalism was partly mitigated by their 'discovery' that the Russian peasant was a born Communist and had consequently nothing to learn from Western Socialism. They retained their faith in Science and Civilization, which they continued to regard as progressive and Revolutionary forces, but Science and Civilization were to be directed into channels consistent with the Communistic Ideals of the Russian people. But whatever their attitude towards the Russian peasant the Populists maintained an unswervingly hostile attitude to all the traditions of State and Church, to Autocracy and Orthodoxy.

The Radicals had infinitely more influence over the *intelligentsia*, especially over its more plebeian layers, but they did not produce much great writing. Their spokesmen in the press at home (as distinguished from that of the Emigrants) devoted themselves mainly to literary criticism. This was partly due to conditions imposed by the censorship, partly to the great achievements of imaginative literature. Russian intellectual opinion was thus ruled by a succession of Radical critics—Belinsky (1811–1848), whom some still believe to be a 'great critic'; Chernyshevsky (1828–1889), who was an economist; Dobrolyubov (1836–1861); Pisarev (1840–1868), who carried farthest the anti-aesthetic

[1] The Narodnik or Populist propaganda 'among the People' is the subject of Turgenev's novel *Virgin Soil*.

intolerance of the time ; and Nikolay Konstantinovich Mikhailovsky (1842–1904), who was an original sociologist, and the leader of the Populists. Their influence was great, but they were neither critics (except perhaps Mikhailovsky, whose essays on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are noteworthy) nor good writers. They (again with the possible exception of Mikhailovsky) wrote intolerable or insipid journalese, and have become entirely unreadable.

An infinitely more important and attractive writer was Alexander Ivanovich Herzen (in Russian Gertsen). He was born in 1812, in Moscow, the natural son of a wealthy nobleman. He came very early under the influence of French Socialism (Saint-Simon) and became the centre of an intimate circle of friends interested in Socialism and Revolution. He was twice exiled to provincial towns. About 1840 he became, next to Belinsky, the leader of the Westernizers. He wrote brilliant popular articles on Natural Science, and in 1846 published a problem novel on free-love (*Whose fault ?*) which attracted attention as one of the first manifestations of the ' Natural School '. In 1847 he went abroad, never to return. He took an active part in the Revolution of 1848 at Paris and at Rome. After the defeat of the Revolution he settled in London, founded a free Russian press, and became the first spokesman of Revolutionary Russia before Europe. When the era of Reform began in Russia he started a newspaper, *The Bell* (Kolokol), which became immensely influential. Even the Russian Government took heed of its advice and was impressed by its revelations. In practical politics Herzen took a moderate course, and in spite of his Socialism he gave his support to the Government of Alexander II as long as he believed it to be sincere in its policy of Reform. But in 1863 during the Polish Rebellion he took the side of the Poles, and this put an end to his influence with the moderate groups and greatly impaired his popularity. *The Bell* came to an end in 1867 and he died in 1870 at Nice.

If Herzen had only written the leaders of *The Bell* his name would be great in Russian political history, but comparatively small in Russian literature. Nor are his novel *Whose Fault?* and his other short stories very important. His place in Russian literature is based on his remarkable memoirs (*My Past and Reflections*) and on a series of articles he wrote after the breakdown of the Revolution of 1848. Of these the *Russian People and Socialism*, which is a letter addressed to the great French historian Michelet on the occasion of his giving vent to some unguarded sentiments on the Russian people in general, in his famous essay on Kosciuszko, is in a way the creed of Russian Socialism. It is a brilliant specimen of Herzen's eloquence, which is French in style, but somehow engagingly easy and informal. But the essays and dialogues collected in *From the Other Shore* and written under the strong impression produced on him by the defeat of the Socialist Revolution are still more remarkable. Herzen was deeply pessimistic, almost as if 1848 had been 1914–1918, and to read the book by the light of recent events is singularly interesting. Herzen possessed great honesty of thought; he did not shrink from what it led him to, and there is nothing more impressive and sadly noble than what he says on the Indifference and Meaninglessness of Nature in one of the dialogues of this series. But he also had the intuition of a deeper and more immanent meaning in Evolution, which stands above and apart from human history. This intuition has in it a strange foretaste of Bergsonism. In *My Past and Reflections*, written between 1850 and 1855, Herzen gives a connected narrative of his life up to 1847, when he left Russia. This is followed by a series of disconnected stories of subsequent years, mainly dealing with Revolutionaries of all Nations. The first part is by far the best. It is at the opposite pole of Aksakov, being frankly lyrical, rhetorical, and subjective. It is not in any way supreme or amazing, but is charming for the natural ease of the narrative, for its somewhat theatrical

sincerity, for the wealth of observation and wit, and for its excellent, unpedantic, man-of-the-world Russian. For Herzen, whatever else he might have been, was first of all a Russian gentleman of easy and well-bred manners and a brilliantly witty conversationalist.

Traditionalism may be roughly identified with the Slavophils. They had much less influence over the educated and semi-educated masses, but intrinsically they were more significant. Slavophilism arose about the same time as Westernizing Radicalism and was also initially influenced by German Idealism. The Slavophils were hostile to the Autocracy of the St. Petersburg Emperors, but were unconditionally attached to the Orthodox Church, and to the religious tradition of the people. They professed a somewhat sentimental admiration for old Muskovy and a faith in the essential unity of Slavdom, as opposed to the Roman and Germanic West. Hence their political Panslavism with its symbolic expression in the desire for Constantinople.

Of the earliest Slavophils the most notable was Alexey Stepanovich Khomyakov (1804–1860), a poet whose devotional and patriotic poetry is the best in the language, and a great religious thinker whose doctrine is the basis of all modern Orthodox Theology. In the reign of Alexander II the Slavophils were brilliantly represented by Ivan Aksakov (1823–1886), the son of the great memoirist, who was an influential and eloquent political journalist. His name became familiar to English politicians in the days of the Berlin Congress. All the Slavophils in the strict sense were noblemen by origin and for all their loving admiration of the Russian people, of its religion and its communism, and for all their ardour for the Democratic Balkan Slavs—they were also essentially aristocrats in their tastes and manners.

A more democratic form of Slavophilism is represented by Dostoevsky (of whom we have already spoken) and his journalistic ally Apollon Grigoriev (1822–1864). Grigoriev was a plebeian,

almost a proletarian, but an intensely Russian plebeian. His career was unsuccessful, his private life was unhappy, and he was always without a penny. Wine, women, and song were all-powerful over him, and were inextricably linked with the two objects of his passion—Russia and Poetry. Russia he almost identified with the 'Surrey Side' of Moscow, the home of Ostrovsky's merchants. He idolized Pushkin, but the poetry of Byron was to him even more intoxicating. 'The Last of the Romanticists' was a phrase Grigoriev liked to apply to himself. A Romanticist he was to the core, and consequently quite out of tune with his times. He was undisciplined and most of his writing is slovenly, but he had flashes of genius. In his intuition of life, the great inscrutable, inexhaustible, ironic power, there is again something Bergsonian. In his memoirs, his letters, and some of his articles his genius will flash out suddenly and dazzlingly. But all his writings are confused, long, and formless. His best are two or three songs, unutterably poignant and melodious, which have survived to this day in the mouth of the Russian gipsy-choruses of which he was so passionately fond.

The more reactionary Traditionalists were pretty influential in politics but their place in literature would have been small but for Constantine Leontiev.

Leontiev (1831–1891) began life as a doctor, an agnostic and a passionate admirer of George Sand and her humanitarian socialism. He wrote stories in the style of Turgenev. Afterwards he entered the consular service in Turkey and wrote a series of good stories of modern Greek life. Under the influence of Greek monasticism he became converted to strict Byzantine Orthodoxy. He quitted the service and passed some months at Mount Athos, submitting to the severe discipline of that extremely ascetic community. He returned to Russia and began publishing a series of papers on political questions. Their extreme Byzantine spirit staggered even the reactionaries. He passed his last years in the

shade of Optina Monastery and died a monk of the severest rule. His profound originality and passionate intensity gradually attracted the attention of men who had no sympathy with his ideas and among others of Vl. Soloviev, and gradually he became, at least for the few, an undisputed classic. He has been compared with Nietzsche and there was really something infinitely daring and Promethean in his revolt against the modern spirit. At the basis of his creed was the belief that beauty was better than good and that societies must be judged by aesthetic standards. This led him to the cult of aristocracy and inequality and to the conscious contempt for social justice. At the same time he was consumed by an ascetic ardour which led him to one monastery after another. His polemical writings are brilliantly eloquent and intensely sincere. His book on Tolstoy's novels is, I think, the best critical work in the Russian language. The fragments he has left us of his recollections are unique for the lightning-like vividness of his narrative and the passionate sincerity that dictated them. In the way of confessions (as distinct from the objective Aksakov style) they are the best in Russian literature.

The end of the nineteenth century is dominated by a more general interest in problems of religion, apart from the Slavophil setting, and religious morality, which is summed up in the opposing names of Tolstoy and Soloviev.

Vladimir Sergeyevich Soloviev (b. 1853 in Moscow, the son of an eminent historian, d. 1900) is the greatest name in Russian Philosophy, and together with Dostoevsky the strongest influence in the recent revival of religion. We cannot discuss this aspect of his work; suffice it to say that his religious philosophy was mystical and Catholic in the original sense of the word, and that he was the first Russian to combine strict religious orthodoxy with a political liberalism of a European type. His writings, theological, philosophical, mystical, and political, are all admirable for their force and lucidity of exposition and style. Of these

The Justification of the Good has been translated into English. But from the literary point of view his principal work, however, is *Three Conversations on War, Peace, and the End of History*, to which is attached a short history of Antichrist. *The Conversations* are a beautiful exposition of the main points of Soloviev's moral philosophy and philosophy of history, but they are also the best and most readable dialogues in any modern literature, full of wit, humour, and solid sense; the persons of the dialogue, The General, The Politician, The Tolstoyite, The Lady, and The Mystic, are all drawn with admirable consistency. They speak up to their characters, and do not go out of their way to give the author an easy triumph. Soloviev's poetry, though it participates in the general low level of poetical culture, is also very remarkable. Most of it is mystical and devoted to the direct description of his visions. But sometimes he introduces a curious breath of humour even into his most serious mystical poetry, and he is second to A. Tolstoy alone in the art of nonsense verse.

7

Chekhov and After

The great age of the Russian novel ended about 1880: the death of Dostoevsky (1881) and Turgenev (1883) and the conversion of Tolstoy mark the end of it. The younger plebeian generation of 1860 had also by that time spent its vitality. There began a new period of followers and imitators, not of pioneers. The 'modernist' tendencies of the young Radicals of the sixties were forgotten, fiction was once more divorced from journalism, and the now classical work of Turgenev, Tolstoy, and their contemporaries became the models the young generation strove to approach. There was a revival of 'art' and 'beauty' about that time which found expression in a hectic flowering of poetry and in the renewed cult of Turgenev. The writers of this revival

were welcomed as great 'artists' in contradistinction to the 'publicists' who had preceded them. They found favour with all parties, and were by way of becoming minor classics. The most prominent of these were Garshin and Korolenko. Vsevolod Garshin (1855–1888) wrote very little, just one volume of short stories, and it is probable that the exiguous extent of his work contributed not a little to give him a semi-classical position. But apart from a greater concern for expression and form than had writers like Uspensky, there is very little to be said for him. His first and best story, *Four Days*, the impressions of a wounded soldier (Garshin had fought as a volunteer in 1877) left to die on the field of battle, produces a certain impression by its grim realism, but all its main characteristics are borrowed from Tolstoy. Tolstoy's later manner is reflected in Garshin's moral stories written in a 'biblical' or 'popular' style. His more personal work is intensely pessimistic. His last years were clouded by mental disease. He committed suicide while insane.

Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko (1853–1921) is a more cheerful writer. His stories of convict life in Siberia (he was for several years a political exile in the Yakut country), of peasant life in Central Russia, and of his early years in semi-Polish Volynia, are all full of a kindly humour and bathed in an atmosphere of sympathetic humanity. His realism, humorous and idealistic, is less gloomy than that of most Russian writers. He was a fundamental optimist. Even in his representations of the veriest villains he finds abundant proof of man's divine nature. His world is a good-humoured and pleasant world, sullied only by the evil presence of despotism. He was an earnest Radical and Socialist, and in his later years won the high esteem of Liberal Russia by his campaign against capital punishment and martial law.

Less generally known, though deserving perhaps a greater reputation, is Alexander Vanovich Ertel (1855–1908), whose best novel, *The Gardenins*, was highly valued by Tolstoy. It was

written largely under his influence. It offers a comprehensive and varied picture of rural life in Central Russia in the critical years after the emancipation, and is remarkable for the good Russian of its dialogue and its Turgenev-like impressions of nature. There were numerous writers much appreciated in their time who have quite lost what interest they once offered. I will mention only N. Garin (pseud. of N. G. Mikhaylovsky (1852–1906) who besides many mediocre books wrote a sort of autobiography consisting of three parts—*Tema's Childhood*, *Schoolboys*, and *Students*. In addition to their considerable literary merits they are a first-rate social document. It is the story of a typical *intelligentsia* education and a very sad story it is. The unhealthy atmosphere seems to thicken with every step forward, and while the first book is on the whole tolerably cheerful, *Students* is a depressing picture of the conditions which attended the growth of Russian intellectuals.

Socially speaking, the period with which we are concerned was one when, after the critical *Sturm und Drang* period of the reign of Alexander II, the newly constituted social class of the *intelligentsia* was settling down to fixed and apparently lasting forms of life, to a new 'byt'. The end of the nineteenth century was politically, socially, and artistically a period of rest and of stagnation. In the historical tradition of the *intelligentsia* the period is identified with the decade 1880–1890 and with the reign of Alexander III (1881–1894), and goes by the name of the Eighties. The first years of Nicholas II's reign are a direct continuation of the Eighties, which may be said to end as late as 1904 with the Japanese War and the first violent symptoms of the Revolution. The general sense of stagnation is well expressed by Rozanov when he tells how on New Year's Day of 1901 he and his friends expressed the hope that the new century would bring events, any events as long as there was a change. The political atmosphere of the average man of the *intelligentsia* (as distinct from the

active members of the parties) may be summed up in Chekhov's dream that 'perhaps in two or three hundred years we shall have a Constitution'. This period is the age of Chekhov, and the dominant mood of his work is that which dominates the period. It is one of impotent yearning after something better, like the Three Sisters' yearning after Moscow. It is known in Russia by the name of 'the Chekhov state of mind'—'Chekhovskoe nastroenie'. When one realizes that for the Russian reader Chekhov is so indissolubly associated with this age and this mood, it will be easy to understand why some Russians find it difficult to share the unbounded admiration for him of certain English critics, like Mr. Middleton Murry or Mr. Gherardi. Chekhov is not for us merely a great artist who may be appraised dispassionately and not found wanting, but the very vivid and very adequate expression of a stage of the past we have no grounds to be proud of, of a past which is largely responsible for the greatest shame of Russian history, the inglorious bankruptcy of the middle classes (=*intelligentsia*) in 1917. For all that, there can be no doubt as to the greatness of Chekhov. Without going to the length of comparing him with Shakespeare, as some English critics have done, without putting him on a level with Russia's greatest writers—Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky—we must recognize that he was the greatest writer of his age and of his class. Whatever the order of his greatness, he was a perfect artist, and achieved in full what he was called to achieve. There were no lost possibilities in him and what he could do he did. This is high praise and one which cannot always be assigned to greater men, not for instance to Gogol or Dostoevsky. Nor was Chekhov precisely typical of his age. Being a great artist, he could not be typical, and being a perfect artist, he lacked the chief feature of his contemporaries—ineffectiveness. But, being a realist, he chose his age for his subject and gave it permanent life in his art.

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born in Taganrog (on the sea of Azov) in 1860. His father had been a serf, but had risen to an independent position and given his children the normal middle-class education at a ' gymnasium ' (secondary school). From the gymnasium Chekhov went to Moscow University to study medicine, and in 1884 became a doctor. But he practised little and very early made literature his principal occupation. He began writing humorous stories for the press as early as 1879. He signed them Antosha Chekhonte, a name by no means suggestive of any literary ambition. The readers of the papers soon began to single him out, and he became a favourite with the general public before he had published his first book. For many years Chekhov was a readers' writer and remained unrecognized by the critics, who continued sneering at him till late in the nineties. Only Suvorin, the proprietor of the large pro-Government *Novoe Vremya*, with his usual sagacity, singled Chekhov out and helped him on till he had acquired a firm footing in general opinion. Chekhov's first book appeared in 1886. It was purely humorous, and so was the one that followed it. But when read one after another, his humorous stories produce an impression of gloom rather than mirth, so uniformly low and common was the provincial middle-class humanity he portrayed. This impression has been since discerned by wise writers, but Chekhov's first readers do not seem to have noticed it, and they read him merely for the fun he offered them, as they had read Saltykov for his fun and not for his social satire. But gradually towards 1890 Chekhov's manner changed and became that which we know. It is between 1890 and his death that he wrote all his best stories. About the same date he began writing serious drama. In 1896 his *Seagull* was produced and hissed off the stage. He was for a time discouraged. But in 1898 the Moscow Art Theatre, headed by the great actor and producer Stanislavsky, took up the play and made it a tremendous success. The new and original style of

Chekhov's drama combined with the equally new and original style of acting to produce an entirely novel effect. The theatre of Chekhov-Stanislavsky replaced in the public favour the theatre of Ostrovsky. *The Seagull* was followed by *Uncle Vanya* and *The Three Sisters*, and at last *The Cherry Orchard*. The first night of this play (January 1904) was the crowning success of Chekhov's career.

But besides a disinterested recognition of his literary greatness, Chekhov received another and more debatable homage from his class. In the eyes of the *intelligentsia* he was included with Tolstoy and Gorky in a sort of trinity, which was felt to be the ideal incarnation of progressive and independent Russia as opposed to the forces of despotism.

Chekhov's health had for some time begun to fail him. His last years had to be spent between the south coast of the Crimea and the health resorts of Germany. He died in 1904 (June 17th) at Badenweiler in South Germany. Those who knew him are unanimous in speaking of his personal charm. He was good-looking, well-bred, gentle and modest. His attitude towards people, even towards people of the stature of Tolstoy, was one of sympathy mixed with pity and humour, of contempt tempered with kindness.

Chekhov in a very broad sense continues the tradition of Turgenev, but he is no imitator, nor even in any strict sense of the word a disciple. He has in common with Turgenev the method which may be called the poetical or suggestive method, as opposed to the analytical method of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. He does not indulge in direct descriptions of his characters' feelings, but by appropriate detail tries to create sympathetic emotions in the reader. Chekhov is a singularly even writer. If one excepts his early and lighter writings, it is very hard to choose between his stories: they are all on the same level of perfection. Every one of them is a perfect bit of work, which

holds together from beginning to end, and which can neither be added to, nor taken away from. He is the supreme *artist* of Russian fiction, the creator of the most perfectly made objects. In this respect he is superior to Turgenev, who possessed this sense of proportion and wholeness in an inferior degree, and whose stories do not produce that impression of everything necessary and nothing superfluous which is the essence of Chekhov's art. On the other hand, Turgenev's Russian is superior to Chekhov's. Chekhov lived in a time when the spoken language was losing its organic raciness, and his is consequently more level and less rich. This makes Chekhov the least difficult of Russian writers to translate. But Chekhov had not the easy mellifluousness of Turgenev, which at its best produced *Bezhin Meadow* and *The Singers*, but at its worst degenerated into the insipid poeticalness of *On the Eve*.

Unlike most of the great Russian writers, Chekhov is not a creator of characters. None of his people is alive with the independent and three-dimensional life of Bazarov, of Anna Karenina, of Stavrogin, or even of the men and women of Goncharov and Ostrovsky. Chekhov's is a more general and less individualized humanity. He deals in that which is common to people, not in that which is peculiar to them. All his characters may really be reduced to two types: the gentle and ineffective dreamer, and the vulgar and efficient man of action. There are infinite gradations in these; but the ineffective people, if sometimes funny, are invariably lovable, and the efficient people are vulgar. Nowhere is this contrast more marked than in *The Cherry Orchard*, between the old proprietors and the *nouveau riche* Lopakhin, who has all the virtues, but is successful, and for that reason alone detestable. For every foolishness and every absurdity Chekhov has an immense treasure of sympathetic pity and understanding, but not for success. This dread of success again links him to Turgenev. But he outdoes Turgenev in the cult of inefficiency. He hated

the man who *deserves* success quite as much as the man who commands it undeservingly. Inefficiency is for him the cardinal virtue, and defeat the only halo. This attitude has been believed by some to be essentially Russian, but in its extreme expression it is certainly quite personal to Chekhov. The tendency of English literature has been the other way, but latterly, and parallel with the great vogue of Chekhov, the cult of Inefficiency and the hate of Vulgar Success has spread in this country. There is nothing more Chekhovian, outside Chekhov, than Mr. Lytton Strachey's life of Cardinal Manning, with the pointed contrast between the active and obviously detestable Archbishop of Westminster and the gentle dreamer Newman.

The cult of inefficiency goes far to explain the general atmosphere of pity for impotent, ridiculous, but lovable mankind which pervades the whole of Chekhov's work. For he is a poet of atmosphere, of the vague thing they called in Russian *nastroenie* and in German *Stimmung*, but for which there is no adequate word in English, except this meteorological metaphor. But Chekhov's art is by no means confined to atmosphere. On the contrary he is one of the most constructive writers of Russian prose. His stories are stories of situation, to which the characters play an entirely subordinate part. In this he has hardly any predecessor in Russian literature, except perhaps Lermontov, whose *Taman* Chekhov thought the best short story in the language. The situations of his stories are not dramatic, but subtly psychological. They are stated not in terms of character, but in terms of humanity. And the means of expression is not analysis, but suggestion. Chekhov found numerous disciples, but none of any worth in Russia; England will again probably have the distinction of following his example with greatest profit. The late Katherine Mansfield was probably the most faithful and at the same time the most original of his disciples.

All Chekhov's mature work is so uniformly excellent that it

is difficult to single out any one of his stories for special praise. Most of them deal with the life of the middle class, of the *intelligentsia*, and of the decaying provincial gentry. But others have for their subject the life of the lower classes. *The Peasants*, with its realistic gloom and melancholy poetry, is second to none. The quintessence of Chekhov's pessimism is concentrated in *Ward N 6*, a dreary vision of an unbeautiful and unsympathetic humanity and of a gentle ineffective dreamer, who finds at last a sympathizing soul in a lunatic asylum. Just as Tolstoy's *Ivan Ilyich* produced a whole sequence of stories of Death, *Ward N 6* gave rise to a series of stories of lunacy in the age when Andreev dominated the book-market. But if I may be allowed to venture an opinion as to the greatest of Chekhov's stories, it would be *My Life*, which is something more than his other stories; its sweep and range are wider; it is like the ultimate poetical synthesis of his intuition. This life of Chekhov's favourite and only hero, the delicate and gentle man haloed by continuous and socially justified defeat, is his *Odyssey* or his *Purgatorio*, a true poem of immense symbolical pregnancy.

The history of Chekhov's plays repeats the broad outline of his tales. There are the early light comedies comparable to the early humorous stories, and there are the wonderful dramas written after 1895. But here there is a more distinct line of progress. The first of his long plays, *Ivanov* (1887), is a failure; the *Seagull* and *Uncle Vania* each mark stages forward; in *The Three Sisters* and in *The Cherry Orchard* he attains the perfection of the genre. This last play, written the year of his death, has been proclaimed by an English critic the greatest play since Shakespeare. However this may be, Chekhov created a new kind of drama, and in this new kind of drama produced masterpieces which are not likely to be surpassed. Chekhov inherited the tradition of the Russian stage of Ostrovsky and still more of Turgenev (*A Month*

in the Country) in deliberately eliminating that element which was thought to be essential to the drama, the element of plot, and in removing from his plays all theatrical effect. Only he went much further in this direction. He made his theatre as untheatrical as possible. On the face of it, his plays were to prove a failure on the stage. And so they did until they found an adequate cast to produce them. Stanislavsky's production of *The Seagull* was a great date in the history of the theatre—undramatic drama was given the freedom of the stage. Chekhov's plays are not progressively developed plots, but 'slices of life' arranged and set together with a poetical, rather than with a dramatic, purpose. What has been said of his tales applies fully to his plays. The effect is attained by absolute and suggestive reality. The construction is not narrative but subtly psychological, or, if the metaphor be allowed, musical. They are calculated to arouse certain sympathetic 'nastroenies', a certain lyrical atmosphere, and in bringing about this effect Chekhov shows a sovereign mastery over his material. In the contrast between the trivial and sordid material he works in and the intensely poetical or musical effect derived from it lies the great charm and originality of Chekhov. Like his tales, his last plays are perfect, with all that is necessary and nothing superfluous in them, instruments of marvellously calculated precision. But to imitate his dramatic system or even to learn from him is obviously impossible. Those who, like Gorky and Andreev, have tried to do so, have failed piteously, and Russian dramatic literature after Chekhov's death is one unrelieved desert.

The work of Chekhov marks the crest of a second wave in the history of Russian Realism. But it is a lesser wave than the one that carried Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky. The age of Chekhov is an Age of Silver. Of its writers Chekhov alone may be compared to the elder ones. Still he was not quite alone.

There was some undergrowth around him, and it seemed for a moment that it would grow to overshadow him. A group of writers born about 1870 came into prominence in the last years of the century and the first years of the new one. They were realists and looked up to Chekhov as to a patriarch, but hardly as to a master. About 1900 there was an impression abroad that we were in for a new Golden Age of Realisitic Prose. But it turned out to be a false dawn. Chekhov died, and the movement almost suddenly lost its vitality—and its hold on the public. It gave way before the vigorous onslaught of a new movement. The writers who had seemed the swallows of a doubtful spring were found to be the ' moping owls ' of an irrevocable past.

The most remarkable writer of this group is Gorky. The others are Bunin, Kuprin, and Andreev, whose work is the decline and fall of Realism laid bare.

Maxin Gorky[1] (whose real name is Alexey Maksimovich Peshkov) was born in 1869 in Astrakhan. He lost his father very early and was brought by his mother to Nizhni-Novgorod, where he was placed with his maternal grandfather, who was a dyer. In *Childhood* he has left us unforgettable portraits of the hard, close old man, and of his charming and poetical grandmother. The boy received no regular education, but learnt to read early. He was apprenticed to various artisans, was for some time pantry boy on a Volga steamer, and later on for several years led the life of a wandering journeyman. Between times he came into touch with a higher civilization. His first master was the drunken, but intelligent cook of the steamer where he was pantry-boy. The one who did most to complete his education was a Mr. Lanin, an attorney of Nizhni, in whose office Gorky was clerk.

In 1892 Gorky published his first story in a provincial newspaper, and a few years later was introduced by Korolenko to the

[1] In strict transliteration—Gor'kiy.

'big literary press'. In 1898 his stories appeared in book form, and had an instant and enormous success. More than 100,000 copies of the book were sold in the first year, and his fame immediately spread abroad. He was hailed as the harbinger of a new era in literature. What most attracted his Russian readers was the bright and bracing atmosphere of his early stories, which seemed to be written in the major key, and offered a strong contrast to the consistent minor key of Chekhov's. The foreign reader was most struck by the subject-matter, the wonderful free and lawless life of the Romantic Russian tramps he depicted.

The charm of these early stories of Gorky's has greatly faded, and Gorky himself has spoken of them with contempt. No one now will maintain that he initiated a new era in Russian literature. On the contrary, the place assigned to him in history on the strength of his later work will be that of the *last* of a great declining tradition. These early stories are immature and tawdry. Their poetry is cheap, and their landscape, though fresh and breezy, is not really strongly original. The message of these early stories was summed up by Gorky himself in formulas such as 'We sing praise to the folly of the brave', and in contrasts such as that between the snake and the falcon. Their spirit is romantic. They prefer a noble lie to the uninspiring truth.

Gorky in these years had a decided leaning towards poetry. He wrote verse, but his highest poetic achievement as well as the best written of his early stories is *Twenty-six Men and a Girl*, a little masterpiece of powerful poetry made out of vile reality. There is, however, more promise of the real Gorky in *Foma Gordeyev*, the life story of a young merchant of Saratov. It is chaotic and formless, but displays a great power of detailed and sagacious observation.

The example of Chekhov led Gorky to try the drama, and between 1901–1906 he devoted himself to it almost exclusively.

His plays are all very bad and most of them attracted little attention. But *The Lower Depths* had an enormous success. This success was due in Russia to the masterly acting of Stanislavsky's company, in the West to the sensational character of the milieu portrayed, a world of philosophical thieves and prostitutes, whose philosophy appealed powerfully to the jaded taste of Europe. For all that it is a very bad play with hardly any redeeming features. The others are, if possible, worse, following Chekhov in the absence of conventional action without any of his dramatic or rather undramatic skill. Gorky had meanwhile joined the Social Democratic party, and owing to his great name abroad became a prominent figure in politics. During the Revolutionary days of 1905 he was editor of a Social-Democratic paper and took an active part in organizing the December rising in Moscow. After the collapse of the Revolution he left Russia. He settled at Capri, where he became immensely popular with the natives. He continued writing, but his popularity began to wane. His new novels—long novels with a social purpose, often clever, but always immensely tedious—met with little success. Critics began to speak of him as of a dead writer. Still his popularity was great, especially outside Russia, and among the semi-educated classes at home. Before the war Gorky returned to Russia and started a monthly magazine. In 1913–1915 he published his first autobiographical books. These books at length give the full measure of his talent. They are infinitely better than all he had written before. But he had already become a writer of the past, and though his new books revived his reputation in literary circles, his work had lost all actuality. This is emphasized by their retrospective character. They may become (they have to a certain extent become) classics, but they have missed the youth of immediate success.

When the great Revolution came in 1917 Gorky sided with the Bolsheviks. He did not do it wholeheartedly. He assumed

a position of superior irresponsibility, condemned the Bolsheviks for their violence, but gave them substantial support in his writings. This position of irresponsible independence did not win him any admirers, but it had an aspect for which Gorky must be gratefully remembered by all friends of Russian civilization. He took on himself the part of Champion of Civilization, and played it in the worst years of 1918–1920 fairly well. It is due to him that the fate of Russian writers, artists, and scholars during these years was not worse. Gorky is a fanatical believer in Western civilization, in enlightenment, and science. He has of late expressed his great contempt and detestation of the Russian peasantry, for their cruelty, superstition, and denseness. But he believes in the urban classes, the workmen, and the intellectuals. In 1922 he left Russia and lives at present in Germany, near Berlin. His claim to a high place in Russian literature rests entirely on the work of his last twelve years. This includes a biographical trilogy, *Childhood*, *In the World* (these two published before the Revolution), and *My Universities* (1923). Apart from these stand *Reminiscences of Tolstoy* and *Fragments from a Diary*. In all these works Gorky proves himself an excellent realist, a powerful and penetrating observer, and a ruthless portrayer of truth as he sees it. What is most remarkable in *Childhood* and *In the World* is the intense vividness of his vision. His people live in the imagination as figures, rather than as characters. They are bathed in a cold hard light which is not sympathetic, but intensely clear. Altogether the two books rank among the best Russian autobiographies. His recollections of Tolstoy are perhaps still more wonderful, for here his keen and penetrating intellect has an object worthy of it. The portrait he draws of the great man is more convincing and satisfactory than any other portrait ever attempted. The same qualities appear in his recollections of Leonid Andreev. His last book, *Fragments from a Diary*, is on the same high level. It is a book of Russian eccentrics, his tribute

to the country where, he says, ' even fools are original '. The only thing one catches no glimpse of in all these autobiographical books is the personality of Gorky himself—the man seems to have nothing but a pair of wonderfully observant, keen, and penetrating eyes. They cast a cold and clear light on all external things, but tell you nothing of what is behind them.

Of the contemporaries of Gorky the least pretentious and the most ' nineteenth century ' is Alexander Ivanovich Kuprin (b. 1870). He served in the army and first made himself known by stories of army life. In 1905 during the Japanese War he published *The Duel*, a novel of garrison life. The picture it gave of the Russian officer was exceedingly dark. It is the last of a long line of social problem novels and it is decidedly ' tendentious '. Its merits, apart from its ' social importance ', are by no means striking. But some of Kuprin's later work displayed a quality rare in Russian novelists—he can tell a story. Good examples of his best manner are *Lieutenant-Captain Rybnikov*, the story of a Japanese spy in Russia, and *The Bracelet of Garnets*, a romantic story of the hopeless love of a poor clerk for an aristocratic lady. But his good stories are few. He lacks style and taste. The work which brought him most success both in Russia and recently in France, *Yama*, is scarcely literature. It is a sensational, sentimental, and vulgarly photographical novel of the life of prostitutes.

A far greater *artist* is Ivan Alexeevich Bunin (b. 1870). Lacking Kuprin's narrative gift, he has carried to the extreme the Russian tendency towards what Miss Harrison calls ' the imperfective ' style. Most of his stories have no movement at all.

Bunin belongs to the tradition of Turgenev and Chekhov—his art is fundamentally poetical. But he has not Chekhov's deep humanity. He is an artist of words, and is the only living writer who writes a Russian that would have satisfied the standards of Turgenev or Goncharov. He is cold and reserved—a true Parnassian possessing in a supreme degree both the Parnassian virtue

of impeccability and impassiveness. It is easy to guess from his prose that he is also a writer of verse, but his verse is rather of the nature of an exercise, intended to keep his style in good shape. The Central Russian country-side is the background of most of his stories. The most considerable of these is *The Village* (1910), which Gorky has declared to be the best thing ever written about the Russian peasant. It is very gloomy and seems to be intended as an illustration to Gorky's recent invective against the peasant. But there is also in Bunin an exotic strain. He loves the south, and his greatest—his only really great story—has Naples and Capri for its background. This is *The Gentleman from San Francisco*, the grim story of a rich American coming to Capri only to die there on the day of his arrival. It is one of the most powerful variations on the eternal theme of the power of Death and the vanity of human life.

The only writer of the generation to rival the popularity of Gorky was Leonid Nikolaevich Andreyev. Born in Orel in 1871, he came of a family of provincial 'intelligents'. He studied at the University of Moscow and became a lawyer, but did not practise. Though sociable and even gay in company, Andreyev from his early years had no genuine interest in life. The presence of the dark realities of death and chaos, and the inanity of all the works and conventions of man were the groundwork of his attitude to the world. As a student he attempted suicide. Later on, his happy marriage with his first wife (who died in 1906) and his popularity were like a veil cast over the dark abysses of his soul, but on the whole the joyless philosophy of his writings was based on his genuine intuition of life.

He began writing as a student. In 1898 his stories, sentimental and conventional, but fresh, began to attract the attention of [illegible]s and fellow-writers, one of whom was Gorky. In 1902 he [illegible] scandalous celebrity by two stories, *The Abyss* and *In the Fog*, which produced a sensation by their crude and auda-

cious treatment of sexual facts. In spite of the scandal it produced, *In the Fog* remains one of his masterpieces. In this and in several other stories written between 1900–1906 he is at his best: he is an intelligent and creative disciple of Tolstoy's problem-stories, of *Ivan Ilyich* and *The Kreuzer Sonata*. The spirit of Ivan Ilyich is especially present in *The Governor* (1906), the story of a provincial administrator condemned to death by the Terrorists and awaiting his assassination. Unfortunately Andreyev did not follow the excellent example he gave in these stories, and long before he wrote *The Governor* developed a very different, 'modernist', and rhetorical style, for which Edgar A. Poe, Maeterlinck, and the Pole Przybyszewski are largely responsible. It is a collection of rhetorical clichés. Intense black and glaring red are his only colours, and there is a complete absence of finer shades. His lack of taste, of culture, and of craftsmanship prevented him from achieving with it anything but crude 'poster' effects. Most of the numerous problem stories he wrote between 1901 and his death are in this unhappy style. Some of them, however, are interesting and attractive for the somewhat sensational and theatrical courage with which he solves the great problems of life and death in the spirit of pure Nihilism. *Thought* (1902), and *Darkness* (1908), with its problem of the 'right to be good' when others are bad, are among the best. Somewhat apart from the rest of his work is *The Seven that were hanged* (1908), where he once more returns to a sober, 'Tolstoyan' manner, and which is rather a tribute to the heroical virtues of the Russian Terrorists, than an indictment of capital punishment.

His plays, which are worse than his stories, are of two kinds. They are either in a very debased 'Chekhov' style, or in the crudely sensational 'symbolical' manner of his later stories. The most typical of these and perhaps the most typical of all his writings is *The Life of Man* (1907), a mystery written in a studiedly abstract and generalized tone. Its constant, and evidently sincere,

though very stagey pessimism, enhanced by the colourless monotony of its dialogue (or rather monologue), does produce a certain cumulative effect, which however is hardly of an artistic nature.

In his later plays he displayed a greater love of melodrama, which in combination with the conventional, marionette nature of his character, makes some of these plays excellent material for the cinema. A typical example of this last development is *He who gets slapped*, which has actually been made into a 'movie' play in America.

In 1914 Andreyev was deeply affected by the outbreak of the Great War. He gave himself away to Patriotism and anti-Prussian feeling, and all he wrote after that date is anti-German, after 1917 anti-Bolshevik, propaganda. As literature all these writings are very poor, and display all his defects without any of his merits. He died in 1919. His fame has faded. As literature most of his work is dead, but it will remain for ever as an historical and psychological document of great value.

Andreyev's popularity was greatest in and about the year 1907. About the same time other writers appeared, whose message was the same as his—Death and Void—and who may be bracketed as the pessimistic school. The most well known of these was Michael Artsybashev (b. 1878), who about 1907 was Andreyev's principal rival in the popular favour. Artsybashev is well known to the English *intelligentsia* by his notorious *Sanin*, a novel on the 'sexual problem'. In so far as it is not mere sensationalism it is a bad imitation of those pages of Tolstoy's where he tries to discredit the civilized and reveal the 'natural' man. Artsybashev's other stories, like for instance *Breaking-Point*—a new treatment of the great theme of death—are comparable to Andreyev's; perhaps just a little less pretentious and crude, but also less sincere.

Less famous at first than Artsybashev, but intrinsically much more interesting, is Sergey Nikolaevich Sergeyev-Tsensky (b. 1876).

Unlike the other writers of the ' pessimistic ' school he is a remarkable craftsman, and the style of his early work, though often excessively ornate, is always vigorous and fresh. Above all he excels in the art of making his characters speak. Of his early stories the best is *Movements* (1910), like so many Russian novels the history of the undoing of a life. The exuberant vitality of the self-made man, who is the hero, in the first chapters, gradually sinks to the resignation that comes before death, and the story ends in the spirit of *Ivan Ilyich*. In his later work Sergeyev-Tsensky has abandoned his exuberant early manner and developed an admirably sober and restrained manner. He has recently (1923) published the first part of a long novel which is to picture the *Transfiguration* of the Russian intelligentsia during the War and the Revolution, and which promises to be one of the most significant works of modern Russian literature.

THE NEW AGE

In the work of Andreyev and his associates the great Realistic tradition had come to an end. But a new movement, which had gradually and imperceptibly grown up within the last decade, was there to replace it. The new movement rejected the tradition of yesterday and sought at first for guidance abroad ; but it soon realized its connexion with older native traditions, hitherto neglected. In its first stages it canonized Dostoevsky, Tyutchev, Fet, Baratynsky, later on Leskov, Leontiev, and Grigoriev ; it gave fresh life to the withered cult of Pushkin and of Gogol, and contributed to the general revival of pre-Realistic Russian literature, a revival which is still in full swing.

Though it is evident that it was a single, if very complex, movement that changed the face of Russian literature between 1894 and 1907, it is difficult to define it in a few words. It may be best of all defined negatively as a revolt against orthodox 'intelligentsiaism'. This orthodox intelligentsiaism expressed itself in the rationalistic, social idealism of the Populists,[1] and in the absolute sway of realism in fiction. The new movement was at first strongly anti-political and individualistic. It was also aesthetic. Its aestheticism was romantic rather than classic, and valued originality above perfection. The first symptom of the new age was a violent assertion of individualism supported by a cult of Nietzsche. Another symptom was the gradual reversal of the respective positions of prose and verse, of matter and manner. The new age became an age of poetry, and found its highest expression in the great poets of the twentieth century, but it first found expression in a series of notable writers, who for want of a better word may be called religious philosophers. The first of these to win public attention was Dmitri Sergeevich

[1] See p. 76.

Merezhkovsky (b. 1865), a remarkably versatile writer, who had begun as a 'civic' poet in the days of Nadson. In the nineties he headed the new movement, then above all things anti-civic, and preached a new Nietzschean Paganism. Then he reverted to a kind of Slavophil Orthodoxy which became about 1905 Revolutionary Mysticism, in the mask of a 'Christianity of the Third Testament'. Such it has remained since, though the Revolutionary element has been greatly abated by a strong disapproval of Bolshevism. Equally versatile is Merezhkovsky in the form of his writings: he has written creditable verse, good novels, excellent (and less excellent) criticism, bad plays, political, mystical, and metaphysical essays. In the nineties and in the early years of the new century he was first of all the champion of Culture, the effective reviver of universal artistic and religious values, of antiquity and the Renaissance. Between 1894 and 1902 he was the mouthpiece of European culture in Russia, something like a Russian Matthew Arnold. His novels *The Death of the Gods* (Julian the Apostate) and *The Forerunner* (Leonardo da Vinci), though entirely lacking in creative force, were good civilizing work. Still better is his book on *Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* (1901–1902), which marks the summit of his achievement. It is not a creative or original book, but it is very clever. It typifies in the best manner the attitude of the cultured reader of his generation towards these two great men. It is his best book by far, and one of the best works of criticism in the language. All he wrote afterwards, including his novels *Alexander I* and the *14 December*, is more or less worthless. He became a victim to a self-made system of rhetorical antithesis which he developed in book after book with depressing monotony and hysterical volubility. A more pleasing writer than Merezhkovsky himself is his wife, who writes under her maiden name of Zinaida Hippius (b. 1867). Her novels and stories are not worth much, but she was the most brilliant journalist and polemist of the new school.

Her criticism is intensely subjective and more often than not very unkind. But her principal achievement is her poetry—the most personal and intellectual poetry of the age. Her best poems are quaint little myths—variations on the Dostoevskian theme of Eternity as ' a bathhouse with cobwebs in the corners '.[1]

Infinitely more significant than Merezhkovsky was Vasili Vasilievich Rozanov (1856–1919), whose first important work, *The Legend of the Great Inquisitor*, appeared in 1890 and ushered in that remarkable series of Dostoevskian Commentaries which became such an outstanding feature of Russian literature towards 1900. Rozanov was a Slavophil by tradition, but he developed his wonderful personality along entirely original lines. He was mainly a journalist and, like Chekhov, owed much of his material success to Suvorin. He wrote on every variety of subject, but his favourite themes were the inadequacy of the historical Church and the problems of Family, Marriage, and Sex. He evolved a perfectly original style, unfettered by conventional rules of composition, and extraordinarily racy. It reached its perfection in the wonderful books of his last years, *Alone with Myself* (Uedinennoe), *Fallen Leaves*, and *The Apocalypse of the Russian Revolution*. They consist of disconnected fragments of a singularly intimate, candid, and unconventional nature. These books are probably the most genuine instance of a ' heart laid bare '. Their strangely intimate subjects will probably make them for ever a sealed book to foreigners. The style, studded with parentheses and quotations, full of allusions and associations, and suggestive rather of an intimate bedroom whisper than of the printed page, contribute to make them a sort of esoteric taboo book open only to his countrymen.

Equally original in thought if not in style is Leo Shestov (b. 1866). His books, like some of Rozanov's and Merezhkovsky's, take the form of commentaries on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, or

[1] See Svidrigaylov in *Crime and Punishment*.

some other great writer. But they are not criticism. They are moral philosophy. His style is largely modelled on the excellent example of Tolstoy's didactic writings; but contrary to the constant 'Thus far and no farther' of Tolstoy, Shestov has the courage to take the extreme consequences of his thought, which is entirely dominated by a campaign against Philosophical Idealism. He reverses the saying of Euripides that 'if the gods do anything shameful they are not gods', and in one of his last essays (*A Thousand and One Nights*) reveals his belief in a God who though intensely human is beyond the sway of human morality, the God of the Old Testament. Shestov is a past master in the art of sarcasm, and he exercises it with elegance, but without pity, against all those who, like Socrates, Spinoza, or the moralist Tolstoy, essayed to build a system of ethics based on rational idealism. He is in tune with those thinkers who saw the irrational roots of the moral universe and fearlessly looked down into the abyss—with St. Paul, Luther, Pascal, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and the irrational Tolstoy who wrote that frightening fragment, the *Memoirs of a Madman*.

Rozanov and Shestov are the most original and from the literary point of view the most significant of the 'Religious philosophers', or 'seekers after God'. Here is not the place to trace a history of the ideas, which tended towards 1910 to converge towards a more strict Christian Orthodoxy. The principal names in this connexion are those of Nicholas Berdyaev and Father Sergius Bulgakov, notable thinkers, but comparatively insignificant *writers*. A still more notable thinker is Father Paul Florensky. His *Pillar and Foundation of Truth* is one of the profoundest and subtlest books ever written on questions of Religion, but is very difficult reading and will greatly perplex an unprepared reader. There was more literary promise in the late Dmitri Boldyrev, who died a prisoner of the Bolsheviks in 1920. He was a psychologist by training, but his political articles written in 1917 prove him to have been a stylist of extraordinary origin-

ality who wrote a Russian that has not its equal for vigour and raciness.

The revival of Russian poetry dates from about 1894. It was the work of a school of poets who were called Symbolists by themselves, and Decadents by their enemies. The initial impulse came, as literary impulses so often have in Russia, from France. It proceeded from Baudelaire, Verlaine, and the poets of 1885. But after its initial stages Russian Symbolism early became a thoroughly national school, which found its masters in Tyutchev and Fet and other classics and developed along thoroughly Russian lines. It was a romantic and lyrical school which put 'music' before all things. It was also metaphysical, and delighted in subjects of eternal and universal significance. The predominance of the musical over the logical element, and the predilection for big themes, as well as a deliberate search after originality and new modes of expression, makes the work of the Symbolists often 'caviare to the general' who charged them with obscurity and preciosity. The initiators of the movement and the chief representatives of this initial foreign or cosmopolitan phase were Constantine Balmont (b. 1867) and Valeri Bryusov (b. 1873). They were at first believed to be great poets, but it is rather difficult at present to revive the enthusiasm that was felt for them twenty years ago.

Balmont in his early work (1894–1904) displayed a beautiful gift of song, but even at its best his poetry lacks all finer shades of expression. And as to his later writings they are an ocean of empty and turgid garrulity. Bryusov's masters were Edgar Allan Poe, the French Parnassians and Symbolists, and the Latin poets of the fourth century. His poetry is entirely formal, but like Balmont's it lacks taste and distinction. It is tawdry. One of his admirers unsuspectingly hit the point when he called it 'gilt bronze'. The verse of both Balmont and Bryusov, besides being crude and tasteless, sounds un-Russian and vaguely

'translated'. Their audience was at first delighted by the exotic novelty of their numbers, but they were forsaken when more genuine goods appeared on the market.

The greatest of the older generation of Symbolists were Innocent Annensky (1856–1909), Theodor Sologub (pseud. of Th. K. Teternikov) (b. 1863), and Vyacheslav Ivanov (b. 1866). All these were great craftsmen and perfect artists. They restored to Russia the high standard that had been lost since the Golden Age of Pushkin. Annensky, in short lyrics of immense concision and elaborately complex structure, gave expression to a modern soul, disillusioned and fastidious, akin in a sense to Chekhov's, but more sensitive and nervous. His poems are difficult and obscure, not because he could not express himself more clearly, but because in its great concentration his art dispenses with the links and bridges of continuous speech. His lyrics are quintessential extracts of emotion, like those perfumes to the making of each ounce of which go pounds of rose-leaves.

Vyacheslav Ivanov, 'Vyacheslav the Magnificent' as he has been called by Shestov, is a great master of ornate and metaphysical poetry. He is a man of immense culture, steeped in all the lore of Christendom and of antiquity. His poetry is Alexandrian in its abundant scholarship, overloaded with the legacy of centuries, but rather Pindaric in the wealth of his beautiful and pregnant diction. Though saturated with Hellenism, it does not sound foreign, for the treasures of Greek diction were naturalized in Russia by the Slavonic Liturgy and the Slavonic Bible.

Sologub (b. 1863) is better known in England than either Annensky or Ivanov, and owes this relative popularity to his prose writings. But he is primarily a poet, and his poetry is of a very high order. He is an austere and forbidding poet. His verse is apparently simple, his vocabulary is limited, his tone is subdued, and there is nothing striking in him, but the perfection and polish to which he brings his verse is amazing and incom-

parable. Unlike though it is to the poetry of the Golden Age, it has the same classical perfection. Sologub is a single-minded poet, his one theme is the opposition of the calm beauty of Eternity to the evil diversity of Life. His philosophy is Manichaean and his cult of Eternity merges in a cult of Death. He hates the creative Divinity. Its emanation is the Sun, the symbol of all the curse of life. This hatred of the Creator easily merges into a Satanism. Sologub is the only one of the older Symbolists to have written great prose, which I will discuss a little farther on in connexion with other novelists.

These older masters were followed by a younger generation whose greatest names are Alexander Blok (1880–1921) and Andrey Bely (b. 1880). Blok is altogether the greatest poet of the whole age, the greatest literary genius of the last quarter of a century. Though less of a craftsman than Ivanov or Sologub, he was made of the same stuff as the great romantic poets of the early nineteenth century. He is akin to Shelley and Lermontov in the powerful divine breath which animated him. He was essentially a genius not only in size, but in mind. His poetry is mystical. In his early lyrics he lives a life of mystic unity with a ' Beautiful Lady ' who is the Sophia of Soloviev's vision or the *Weltseele* of German Romanticism. This early poetry is nebulous and diaphanous to the point of seeming non-existent. It is of the stuff that dreams are made of. But before long he lost his faith in his mystic visions. All his later poetry (from 1905 onwards) is like Heine's, the expression of one continuous dissonance between the Real and the Ideal. It is as musical and even more so than his early lyrics, but it becomes more solid, more material, more realistic. The whole of life enters into his ken. Passionate longing, blind passion, and bitter irony become the dominant notes of his poetry. His world is akin to Dostoevsky's world of antithesis, and also to the dreadful waste of despair and emptiness in which lived Andreyev. But unlike Andreyev, Blok is a great artist, his words are always

fresh and new, alive with the breath of genius. In his best lyrics Blok strikes the note of cosmic grandeur and tragical majesty in the first line and sustains it to the last. For sweep and for what the French call 'souffle' he has no equal among recent poets, not only in Russia. After losing his faith in his Mystic Lady he thought at one time to have found a new Faith in Russia. Much of his best poetry between 1908–1916 is inspired by his passionate love for his country. When the Revolution came it dazzled and stunned Blok by its enormous elemental force, and he thought he saw in it the final and essential expression of the ardent and impulsive soul of Russia. Under this impression he wrote his greatest poem *The Twelve*. Here his power of expression reaches to a pitch which makes it a poem of almost superhuman power. It is at once musical in structure and realistic in subject. His supreme mastery of rhythm far surpasses the ordinary limits assigned to poetic expression, and transcends the rational element of speech. But the words he uses are the slang of the streets and the pictures he evokes (it is the story of twelve Red guardsmen bullying the *bourgeois* in the first days of the Bolshevist triumph) are boldly, even crudely real. The perfect fusion of the musical and realistic element gives the poem its unique and supreme position. But Blok's genius was essentially feminine and passive, and after this last fitful achievement inspired by the breath of the Revolution there followed in him a reaction of complete impotence and black despair. He lost his momentary faith in the Revolution, and his last years were spent in a state of terrible gloom and emptiness. He saw the gradual ruin of Petersburg and Russia round him and died of heart disease in August 1921.

Andrey Bely (b. 1880; pseud. of B. N. Bugaev), the contemporary and parallel of Blok, is also a mystic—philosopher, poet, novelist, anthroposophist,[1] dreamer and charlatan; he has not

[1] Bely was from 1911 to 1916 one of the most faithful adepts of Rudolf Steiner, and an inmate of his theosophical establishment near Bâle.

BLOK

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created anything supreme in poetry, but his novels, of which I will speak farther on, are among the most wonderful productions of the Russian twentieth century. He is a man of extraordinary biographical interest and his personality will be an inexhaustible mine of interest to the future biographers. He has written a biographical work of first-class rank in his amazing Reminiscences of Blok.

The poetry of the Symbolists as a whole had, for all its great qualities, substantial drawbacks. It was feminine, passive, more receptive than active. It was also on the whole too exclusively musical, and the appeal of its metaphysical subject-matter, apart from its occasional obscurity, was not sufficiently broad. With the exception of Blok, the Symbolists, even the very emotional and human Annensky, remain rather poetry for a minority. Besides their philosophy, their mentality was essentially unhealthy and unproductive, and in this sense they well deserved the appellation of Decadents, though as masters of their art they were the very reverse. The Symbolist triumph was followed by a reaction. It found expression in two divergent movements: the Petersburg School rejected music and metaphysics and turned towards clear and more concrete verbal expression; the Futurists started a poetry of prose and revolutionary formalism. But for all their reaction both these movements continue and even exaggerate an important feature of the Symbolist poetry—the cult of form and the preference of Manner to Matter.

The Petersburg School made itself the champion of restraint and clarity. It rejected the metaphysical style of Ivanov and endeavoured to be more Latin and classical. Its patriarch is Michael Kuzmin (b. 1875), whose charming *Songs of Alexandria* (1906) were the first swallow of the classical spring. The leader of the movement was Nicholas Gumilev (1886–1921), who founded the Petersburg Guild of Poets and gave the younger poets lessons in their craft. He was at heart a man of action. He travelled in

Africa, fought with distinction in the Great War, and was executed by the Cheka in 1921 on an alleged charge of conspiring against the Soviet Government. His poetry is manly and bracing, full of the romance of adventure and fighting and of the exotic charm of tropical lands. It strikes a note rare in Russian literature when in a poem like *The Captains* he sings the praise of the great adventurers of the high seas.

A more delicate and refined poet is Anna Akhmatova, for the last ten years the most widely popular of all writers of Russian verse. She writes little and her poetry displays in the highest degree the classical quality of restraint. Her poems are 'dramatic lyrics', where the substance of a novel is condensed into eight or twelve terse and compact lines. Her subject-matter is ordinary human feeling, free from all metaphysical complexity. In her last work she has attained to a still severer and sterner form of expression. In a series of lyrics on the woes of her country, her style becomes truly grand in its tragic simplicity.

Less famous than Akhmatova, but not less highly valued among his fellow-poets, is Joseph Mandelstam, whose poems, written for the most part on historical or literary subjects, attain a beautiful oratorical sweep which has led a critic to say that the language he uses is not really Russian, but Latin.

The Futurist movement largely belongs to post-Revolutionary days and consequently falls outside the scope of this book. But its most significant representative, Vladimir Mayakovski (b. 1893), began writing in 1912. In spite of many extravagancies, his poetry, which is largely political (he is a Communist), possesses great qualities of vitality and physical health. Mayakovski is first of all a man with strong lungs, and his loud utterings, if not always refined, often crude and even coarse, are essentially the healthy outcome of a man with buoyant animal spirits.

The Symbolists, who achieved so much in poetry, made occasional ventures into the province of imaginative prose, but most

of their stories (for instance Bryusov's, which are largely traceable to the influence of Edgar Poe) are derivative and altogether inferior to their verse. The only exceptions are Sologub, who stands apart in splendid isolation, and Bely, whose novels, together with Remizov's, may be considered as having started the modern school of Russian fiction. Sologub's prose is as beautiful as his verse and permeated with the same Manichaean Philosophy. His writings are all based on the essential contrast of the Ideal and the Real, which he is fond of symbolizing in the figures of Dulcinea and Aldonsa, only in his prose the world of coarse reality and brutal action is painted with greater vividness than in his verse. Most of his short stories are tangibly symbolical. The scene is laid more or less outside time and space, for Life's evil Diversity is the same everywhere, and equally coarse and ugly whether it happens to effect the forms of a Russian suburb or of a medieval castle. His greatest work, the wonderful novel which bears in the English translation the somewhat inadequate name of *The Little Demon* (the French rendering *Le demon mesquin* is better; the Russian is *Melky Bes*), assumes all the appearance of a realistic novel of provincial manners. But the mask must not deceive. It is a poetical and symbolical novel like his stories and lyrics. Written with great power and perfectly constructed, it is probably the best Russian novel since the death of Dostoevsky. Like all Sologub's work, it turns on the antithesis between beauty in thrall of reality (the boy Sasha Pylnikov) and the brutal, coarse, and joyless spirit of brute reality itself in the person of the assistant head master Peredonov. This is a symbolical figure of enormous realistic convincingness. Peredonov is a bully who finally succumbs to a mania of persecution. His name has become a word of the language to designate the joyless evil of the narrow and dark mind. A more bewildering production is the romantic trilogy *The Created Legend* (or more exactly, as the Russian participle is imperfective, *The Legend in*

process of Creation) with the figure of Trirodov, Satanist and Socialist, who is for Sologub the ideal priest of Dulcinea. The second and third parts of the trilogy (*Queen Ortruda* and *Smoke and Ashes*), in which the scene is shifted to the imaginary Kingdom of the United Islands, belong to Sologub's most charming work and may be read for the interest of the romantic story, even apart from the hidden meaning, which may not be to the taste of all readers. It is the most attractively romantic of Russian novels and very unlike their common run.

The novel cannot exist divorced from life. And the 'metaphysical' novel outside space and time, whether it stands on the low level of Andreyev and Artsibashev, or on the very high level of Sologub, was doomed to be superceded by a new realism. This new realism is very unlike the old one, for first of all it has drunk deep of the art of the Symbolists, or rather breathed the air infected by its vapours. It is miles away from the elaborately artless (in reality supremely artistic) simplicity of Turgenev, Tolstoy, or even Chekhov. Like contemporary poetry, it is more concerned with manner than matter, and though it deals with actual life it approaches it in another spirit. It does not aim at the exact reproduction of reality, still less of the true proportions of reality. It uses the material of reality for its own constructions, which may be mellow or grotesque, but which are primarily meant to be expressive and pregnant. The German term of Expressionism may be justly applied to this Russian School, though it has little in common with the practice of the German Expressionists.

The history of this new style begins in the year 1909 when it produced its first two masterpieces, *The Silver Dove* of Bely and Remizov's *The Story of Ivan Semenovich Stratilatov*. Bely's novel is a story of a Russian Intelligent who comes under the influence of a sect of mystics. The story is told with great skill and written in a style rich and suggestive and singularly varied. In the

humorous parts it is strikingly reminiscent of Gogol. Its great achievement lies in the powerful inner rhythm which carries on the whole story towards the tragic end of the hero in the trap laid for him by the sectarians. Bely's other two novels (*Petersburg* and *Kotik Letaev*), the one a rhythmical symphony on a political theme, the other an exaggeratedly subtle story of a childhood, mark a falling off. The rhythmical element becomes crude and formal, and the author gets entangled in the meshes of his all-too-elaborate proceedings. They are failures, but failures of genius. The Idea of *Petersburg*—the incarnation of mathematical nihilism—has exercised a powerful influence on the Russian imagination. Bely's most accessible and least difficult prose-work is his reminiscences of Blok, which are full of an extraordinary original humour and vividly grotesque pictures of Russian literary men.

Alexey Remizov (b. 1877) is a very complex writer whose versatility is great, but under all its forms his unmistakable and charming personality is strikingly apparent. He has created an entirely fresh style of Russian prose, based not on the logic of written language, but on the system of intonations of living speech. He has succeeded in giving the Russian language all its natural and illogical freedom, which even in the raciest of nineteenth-century writers is covered by a veneer of classical grammar. His masters are Dostoevsky, Gogol, and Leskov. It is impossible here to give any detailed account of his many-sided activity—of his Fairy Tales, of his stories from the Apocrypha, of his charming prose-poems on folk-lore subjects, of his wonderful dreams, and his no less wonderful memoir writings. But *The Story of Stratilatov* and the other stories of this kind were great literary events which created a new school. The essential feature of these stories is a new method of constructing the story. Its movement is not along a line of time, but towards a single point. It is like the unravelling of a ball of silk. These concentric stories have for their centre a human soul and for their periphery the

grotesque milieu of an old-world Russian country town. The provincial environment, the psychocentric construction, the selection of grotesque detail, the purity and raciness of language, and a profound human sympathy, not wistfully mellow as in Chekhov, but scorchingly intense as in Dostoevsky, are the essential features of these stories.

They soon began to be imitated and are still imitated in increasingly high proportions. But most of Remizov's followers have only been able to imitate the grotesqueness of the master, but not his art of construction, nor his Russian, nor his human inspiration. The best known of these neo-realists is Alexey Nikolaevich Tolstoy (b. 1882), who possesses a wonderful gift of making his characters alive, but no gift of telling a story. The extreme expression of the grotesque tendency is Eugene Zamyatin, who has been the medium of transmitting Remizov's influence to a whole school of young writers. In Zamyatin the expressionist method becomes a mosaic of more or less expressive and striking detail, without any artistic unity. The best of Remizov's followers is Michael Prishvin, who is the only one to rival the master in his command of Russian. Unhappily this excellent writer has written very little and most of that is rather descriptive journalism than fiction. But at least one of his stories is a veritable masterpiece of great originality and singular beauty. This is *The Beast of Krytoyarsk* (1914), the story of a dog—one of the very few really good animal stories in the language.

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INDEX

Akhmatova, Anna, 110.
Aksakov, Ivan, 79.
Aksakov, S. T., 19–22.
Andreyev, 97–9.
Annensky, 106.
Artsybashev, 99.
Avvakum, 5.

Balmont, 105.
Baratynsky (Boratynsky), 8.
Belinsky (Byelinsky), 10, 76.
Bely, Andrey (Byely, ps. of Bugaev), 108–9, 113.
Berdyaev, 104.
Blok, 107–8.
Boldyrev, 104.
Boratynsky : *see* Baratynsky.
Bryusov, 105.
Bugaev : *see* Bely.
Bulgakov, 104.
Bunin, 97.
Byelinsky : *see* Belinsky.
Byely : *see* Bely.

Cantemir (Kantemir), 11.
Chekhov (Tchehov), 85–92.
Chernyshevsky (Tcherni-), 76.
Chestov : *see* Shestov.
Chtchedrine : *see* Shchedrin.

Derzhavin, 6, 10.
Dobrolyoubov, 76.
Dostoevsky, 42–54.
Druzhinin, 16.

Ertel, 83–4.

Fet (Foeth ; Shenshin), 73.
Florensky, 104.
Foeth : *see* Fet.
Fonvizin (Von Wiesen), 11.

Garin (Mikhailovsky), 84.
Garshin, 83.
Gertsen : *see* Herzen.
Gippius : *see* Hippius.
Gogol, 9–10, 12–13.
Goncharov, 33–5.
Gorky (ps. of A. M. Peshkov), 92–6, 103–7.
Griboyedov, 11.
Grigoriev, 79–80.
Grigorovich, 16.
Gumilev, 109–10.

Herzen, 77–9.
Hippius Gippius (Mme Merezhkovsky), 102–3.
Homyakov : *see* Khomyakov.

Igor, Campaign of, 5.
Ivanov, Vyacheslav, 106.

Joukoffsky : *see* Zhukovsky.

Kantemir ; *see* Cantemir.
Karamzin, 6.
Khomyakov, 79.
Kokhanovsky Nadezhda (ps. of Mme Sokhansky), 36.
Korolenko, 83.
Krylov, 11.
Kuprin, 97.
Kushchevsky, 39.
Kuzmin, 109.

Leontiev, Constantine, 80–1.
Lermontov, 9, 12.
Leskov (Lyeskov), 39–42.
Lomonosov, 6.
Lyeskov ; *see* Leskov.

Mandelstam, 110.
Mayakovsky, 110.
Maykov, 71.
Melnikov : *see* Pechersky.
Merejkovsky (Merezhkovsky), 102.
Merezhkovsky, Mme : *see* Hippius.

Mikhailovsky, N. G. : *see* Garin.
Mikhailovsky, N. K., 77.
Moussorgsky (Musorgsky), 70.

Nadson, 75.
Nekrasov, 73–5.

Ostrovsky, 67–9, 70.

Pechersky, ps. of Melnikov, 36.
Peshkov : *see* Gorky.
Pisarev, 76.
Pisemsky, 35–6, 68–9.
Polonsky, 72.
Pomyalovsky, 38.
Pouchkine : *see* Pushkin.
Prishvin, 114.
Pushkin, 7–9, 11.
Pyeshkov : *see* Peshkov.

Remizov, 113–14.
Rozanov, 103.

Saltykov (Shchedrin), 36–8.
Sergeyev-Tsensky, 99.
Shchedrin (Chtchedrine) : *see* Saltykov.
Shenshin : *see* Fet.
Shestov (Chestov), 103–4.
Sluchevsky, 75.
Sokhansky, Mme : *see* Kokhanovsky.
Sologub, Theodore (ps. of Teternikov), 106–7, 111–12.
Soloviev, Vladimir, 81–2.
Sukhovo-Kobylin, 69.

Tchehov : *see* Chekhov.
Tchernichevsky : *see* Chernyshevsky.
Teternikov : *see* Sologub.
Tioutchev ; *see* Tyutchev.
Tolstoy, A. K., 70, 72–3.
Tolstoy, A. N., 114.
Tolstoy, L., 42–4, 54–66, 69–70.
Tourgueneff : *see* Turgenev.
Turgenev, 22–33, 68.
Tyutchev (Tioutchev), 9.

Uspensky, Gleb, 38.

Von Wiesen : *see* Fonvizin.

Yazykov, 8.

Zamyatin, 114.
Zhukovsky (Joukoffsky), 7.

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